

Becoming a College-Going District:
Variation, Complexity, and Policy Implementation

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved November 2011 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2011

ABSTRACT

This study examined the enactment of a high school district's college-going mission. Treating mission enactment as a case of policy implementation, this study used the lens of complexity theory to understand how system actors and contexts influenced variation and adaptation. Data collection methods included observations, interviews, focus groups, and surveys of various system actors including district staff, principals, counselors, teachers, and students. This study used a mixed methods analytic inductive technique and Social Network Analysis to describe the mission's implementation.

Findings reflect that the mission was a vaguely defined value statement; school staff reacted to the mission with limited buy-in and confusion about what it really meant in practice. The mission lacked clear boundaries of what constituted related programs or policies. Consequently, in this site-based district, schools unevenly implemented related programs and policies. School staff wanted more guidance from district staff and clear expectations for mission-related actions. To help meet this need, the district was moving to a more centralized, hierarchical approach. Though they were providing information about the mission, district staff were not providing specific, responsive support to organize school staff's efforts around implementation. District staff were trying to find an approach that both supported schools towards a common vision and provided flexibility for school-level adaptations. Yet, the district had not yet fully formed its position as a facilitator of implementation. Further, as the district lacked a cohesive measurement system, the effectiveness of this initiative was unknown.

This study sought to present policy implementation as varied phenomenon, influenced by system actors and conditions. Findings suggest that while policy cannot determine actions, district staff could help create conditions that would support implementation.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who taught me to value education and encouraged me to pursue my goals; to my students who persevered through insurmountable odds; and to my spouse who, as a first generation college student, inspired me with her unfailing commitment to complete her degree. Each of you have shaped me and my career path in ways I could never fully articulate. Finally, this is dedicated to the memory of my mother. Mom, I honor you and acknowledge all of the sacrifices you made and the hopes and dreams you were never able to fulfill. You enabled me to follow mine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation can be a lonely pursuit. However, numerous colleagues, professors, family, and friends made me feel utterly supported throughout this process. First, I would like to thank the staff and students of Ciudad for sharing their perspectives with me and making this dissertation possible. My committee provided keen guidance and recommendations. Dr. Berliner, you always challenged me to push beyond my current thinking and inspired me with your thirst to understand the heart of an issue. Dr. Smith, you taught me what it meant to be a reflective mixed methods researcher and to never settle for a cursory explanation. Dr. Danzig, you kept me grounded in the “why” and reminded me of the importance of the daily work of schools. I cannot thank each of you enough for your time and support.

There were so many professors who helped me shape the idea for this dissertation. Most notably, Dr. Gustavo Fischman and Dr. David Schaefer offered me invaluable training and guidance for which I am very grateful. I am also grateful to Dr. Jeanne Powers and the ASU Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Fellowship for helping make this dissertation possible.

Two dear friends and colleagues, Dr. Gerald Blankson and future Dr. Cynthia Mruczek, saw me through this entire process. Gerald helped me from the beginning and was a constant source of ideas, techniques, information, and support. Much of this dissertation was formed through our discussions; you helped me create something beyond what I would have without you. Cynthia offered a different perspective and valuable feedback. Sometimes even more

importantly, Cynthia, you offered me care, friendship, and words of encouragement. So many other classmates provided support and encouragement that I cannot possibly name them all, but they include: Drs. Melissa Rivers and Carol Sumner and future Drs. Clarin Collins, Erin Nolan, Jennifer Shea, Rebecca Lish, Noreen Balos, and Kori Hamilton.

I am grateful to my research partner, soon to be Dr. Antonia Franco. Your support was invaluable and brought so much to this dissertation. My former Stanford classmates, Katherine Onorato and Aurora Wood-Moore, and professor Dr. David Labaree, remained close colleagues and encouraged me to pursue my Ph.D. and offered support and guidance. My former colleagues from the American Institutes for Research, especially Dr. Tom Parrish, taught me how to be a researcher and encouraged me to embark on the journey of a doctoral program. Thank you to my colleagues in the ASU Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness for your constant support. Dr. Shelly Potts, thank you for providing me encouragement, flexibility, and guidance along the way.

Thank you to my family for believing in me and keeping me grounded. Mom II, thank you for your support and your careful teacher eye on this dissertation! Dad, thank you for reminding me of what is most important. Grandma, thank you serving as an inspiring example of strength and courage. Sean, thank you for demonstrating persistence and dedication to your personal goals, and supporting mine. Thank you to my dear spouse, Tisha Gonzales, for encouraging me, supporting me, and being an understanding partner throughout this journey. I literally could not have done this without you. Gratitude abounds.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and Purpose of the Study

Policy implementation is an important, yet easily overlooked, area of educational research. While researchers often study the process of policy development, once policies are sent to the field, researchers and policymakers make assumptions about their enactment. It is not until someone asks how well the policy is working that researchers return to the policy to examine it through an evaluative frame. However, if we were to better understand what and who influences policy implementation, then we could better understand the larger policy arena.

While research has established that there is often a gap between an intended policy and its enactment, there is a need for more information on the complex interaction of factors that influence implementation (Honig, 2006a; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; McLaughlin, 1987, 2006; Wang, Nojan, Strom, & Walberg, 1984). Identifying and understanding these interactions would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of policy implementation and the larger policy arena. Yet, to identify and understand these interactions, strong theoretical and conceptual frameworks must be applied (Honig, 2006a). This study aims to explore implementation influences using an emerging theoretical framework and cutting-edge analysis techniques.

In 2008, an urban high school district in a Southwest city implemented a policy to prepare students for college and career. This district-initiated policy presented a unique and compelling case of policy implementation in a local

context and on a timely subject. This study examined who and what influenced implementation through the lens of complexity theory. The purpose of this study was to explain how, in a complex system, system actors and contexts influenced policy implementation and enactment. Rather than seeing implementation as a dichotomy (the policy is implemented or it is not), this study sought to present policy implementation as a more varied phenomenon influenced by system actors and conditions.

Identifying and understanding these interactions would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of what and who influences implementation. In addition, as this is a district-initiated policy rather than an externally instituted policy, it presents a unique and compelling case of policy implementation in a local context and on a timely subject given our nation's desire to produce a higher number of college-prepared students.

Ciudad (pseudonym) was a large urban high school district of over 25,000 students, the overwhelming majority of which were Latino and qualified for free or reduced price lunch. More than a dozen elementary districts fed into this grade 9-12 district comprised of 16 schools. According to state data, 60% of Ciudad schools were in federal school improvement status. The district graduation rate was near 80% in 2008-2009, a rate higher than most urban districts in the country. For example, Chicago Public Schools had a graduation rate near 55%, Los Angeles near 70%, and Albuquerque close to 66% (California Department of Education Educational Demographics Office, 2010; Chicago Public Schools, 2010; New Mexico Public Education Department, 2010). The district had

drastically increased its graduation rates from 43% in 1990. Because of the district's relatively high graduation rates, it shifted its focus to become a college-going district and to enroll more students in post-secondary education.

In spring 2008, Ciudad adopted a mission to prepare every student for success in college, career, and life. This district mission resulted in district policies such as increased graduation requirements, adoption of individual student education plans, advisory periods, and district-wide ACT testing. This study examined the enactment of the mission and its related policies as a case of policy implementation.

Mission Enactment as a Case of Policy Implementation

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2010), one definition of policy is a “high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body.” The American Heritage College Dictionary (1997) defines policy as a “course of action, guiding principle, or procedure considered expedient, prudent, or advantageous.” Beyond the text of a policy, the ideals, values, and discourses that underlie policies are important considerations (Smith, 2004). The concept of a mission closely aligns with these definitions- it is a guide for district activities, a high level plan, and a goal-oriented principle. Though not traditionally defined as a policy, a mission can serve as a policy in this sense. This district's mission, though only a guiding statement, had specific aligned actions and strategies which were adopted by the governing body of the school board.

Because of this, I treat this case as a case of policy implementation; however, I acknowledge that some would say this mission is not a policy in the strict sense of the term. Regardless of the terminology, the mission and its related components are best understood as a policy. First, there is more research on policy implementation than on mission changes to contextualize this case. Second, to term this a simple mission change ignores the meaningful actions that arose in the district as a result of this change. Third, the mission change signaled a shift in the values of the district, and policy literature best explains this. In subsequent sections, I refer to the mission as a policy or initiative and apply policy concepts in order to understand its implementation.

Policy Design. In the conventional model, policy is rational, linear, and a straightforward approach to address public needs (Smith, 2004). Deborah Stone (2002) refers to this attempt to approach policy as a scientific endeavor as “the rationality project” (p. 7). Policymakers attempt to characterize policy-making as a process of rational decision-making. Yet, policy is inherently a political process to serve particular values, interests, and goals (Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Smith, 2004; Stone, 2002).

There are several models that present policy-making as unpredictable, political processes. Sir Geoffrey Vickers (1965), in his appreciative system, described policy-making as a decision-making process of judging what is, what ought to be, and what can be done to bring those two ideas closer (Adams, Catron & Cook, 1995). For Vickers, this process is not merely at the individual level; rather, it involves communication and interaction with others. In an appreciative

system, judgment is a mental, as well as a social, process. Policy making is the setting of norms and “assumes, expresses, and helps to create a whole system of human ‘values’” (Vickers, 1965, p. 43). Vickers’ appreciative system views the policy process as an attempt to resolve disparate influences, ideas, and conceptions of problems to optimize possible solutions.

In a more pessimistic model described by Stone (2002), conflicting values, political communities (i.e. the polis), political reasoning, and boundary tensions form political pressures negotiating and framing policy. The policy process is a struggle over notions and ideals; a metaphor-generating process to get others to “see a situation as one thing rather than another,” (Stone, 2002, p. 9). Murray Edelman (1985) conceived of policy as a spectacle with symbolic language, casting, staging, and illusions of rationality and democracy. In this model, the political realm emulates theater. Mary Lee Smith (2004) used Edelman’s framework to demonstrate how the political spectacle has influenced, and ultimately distorted, education policy.

While these conceptions of policy making differ in the degree of perceived ambiguity and clandestine motives of policymakers, they underscore the political nature of policy formation. Policies are not primarily rationally conceived solutions; they are typically carefully constructed messages to direct behavior. With this understanding in mind, I examine the district’s policy formation, goals, targets, and tools.

Policy Formation and Elements. At the time of the mission adoption, a long time principal in the district was serving as interim superintendent. He and

another district leader, by their recount, began to discuss what would happen if Ciudad had higher expectations for students. Instead of focusing on passing the state standard for graduation, a 10th grade exam, district leadership became focused on college preparation. District leaders knew this would not be an easy undertaking. For example, while examining course-taking data, a district leader noticed a pattern she deemed “racist” where certain students were being placed in Algebra as freshmen, even if they took Algebra in 8th grade. District leaders described this culture of low expectations as the “Pobrecito Syndrome.” The word *pobrecito* is Spanish for “poor little thing.” Pobrecito Syndrome refers to educators who feel sorry for disadvantaged students instead of holding them to high standards.

In a move to set norms and demonstrate the need for a college-going policy, the interim superintendent and other district leaders began to engage the school board in discussions about college preparedness. At the same time, the current superintendent was being interviewed for his position and sat in on the meetings where the board adopted the new mission. The current superintendent described the mission as being aligned with his vision and said that he felt a part of the adoption process.

The problem, as presented by the district leaders, was that 1) students overall were being held to a low standard of simply graduating from high school and 2) students were being held to different expectations based on their race or socio-economic status. The solution was to provide a sweeping message from the board that the district was going to prepare all students for college. The mission

change was both symbolic and concrete, as demonstrated by its policy design elements. Schneider and Ingram (1997, p. 2) define observable policy design elements as:

- Target populations, or the recipients of policy benefits or burdens
- Policy goals or problems to be solved; the values to be distributed
- Rules to guide or constrain action
- Rationales to explain or legitimate the policy
- Assumptions or the logical connections that tie the elements together

Using Schneider and Ingram's (1997) definitions, I describe the observable elements of the policy in the following sections.

Policy Targets. Targets are the people named in policy as “slated for change” (Honig, 2006a, p. 12) and are “the recipients of policy benefits or burdens” (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 2). This policy did not name a particular group of students; rather, the policy named students, overall, as the targets.

However, given the history of the district, the primary policy targets were likely to be the low-income, minority students that comprised the majority of the district population. Students may benefit from the policy by receiving a more rigorous education, but they may also be burdened. They would have to be more deliberate about their post-secondary plans and would likely feel increased pressure to pursue college. Further, if students had inadequate training in elementary and middle school, then a more rigorous curriculum and higher expectations would also burden students.

District staff, principals, counselors, teachers, and other school staff, though not named in the policy, are also targeted groups. In order for the policy to work in the district, these groups would likely have to change their practices, and perhaps even beliefs. It is likely that these groups would have to take on many of the burdens of the policy, such as the logistics, paperwork, and tracking. District and school staff, however, may enjoy benefits such as more engaged students or increased cohesion in their professional networks. And they may also experience increased pride in their profession.

The district as a whole may also benefit by improving its reputation. The superintendent noted in a district newsletter that with declining enrollments, shrinking budgets, and competing nearby schools, the district must change to prevent becoming obsolete. If the district could improve the actual (or perceived) quality of its education, then it may be able to retain students who would have otherwise gone to charter schools or private schools in the area. Yet, the district may experience the burden of more students dropping out of school because of increased expectations. Finally, colleges and businesses may benefit from students with higher levels of academic achievement upon graduation from high school.

Policy Goals. The goal of the policy was for the district to prepare students for college, career, and life. The problem to be solved was the low college-going rates in this district and the de facto tracking resulting from lower expectations for certain groups of students. Though the policy addressed “career and life” in addition to college, the message of the policy was clear. College was

the ultimate goal. Success, from this policy standpoint, meant more students going to college. The values to be distributed were the middle class conception of education as opportunity and the path to future success.

The district outlined multiple general success indicators and goals for this initiative in a district brochure in 2009. These indicators and goals required additional, undefined, changes at the district and school levels. The goals are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Ciudad Mission Goals

Increase number of students across all demographic groups who enroll in post-secondary options.
Increase number of students across all demographic groups who apply for and earn scholarships for post-secondary study.
Increase parent awareness of preparing for college and career.
Increase higher level course-taking for students across all demographic groups.
Increase participation of students taking college entrance exams.
Increase implementation of high standards and increased rigor in academic programs.
Increase percent of students demonstrating college-readiness in first year of post-secondary study.
Increase percent of career and technical education (CTE) program completers.
Increase rates of students entering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions.
Increase number of student athletes entered into NCAA Clearinghouse by 10 th grade to be eligible for scholarships.

These were general goals, not explicit indicators of success. They lacked explicit metrics or measures of success (e.g. a particular number for the expected increase). Their ambiguity made it difficult for the district to know if it was achieving its goals. District leaders acknowledged the nebulous nature of these goals as measures of success; they indicated that they would like to build a measurement system to assess the effectiveness of this policy.

Policy Rules. Policy rules “guide or constrain action” (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 2). In Ciudad, the policy included two explicit changes:

- Required individualized “4 + 4 Plans” developed by students and counselors to plan the courses and extra-curricular activities for the four years of high school and the four years beyond high school.
- Increased graduation requirements, effective 2013, to include more mathematics and laboratory science credits to align with college entrance requirements.

Policy Rationales. The rationale for this policy was that students should have the opportunity to pursue whatever post-secondary option they wish. Their high school education should form a foundation for their goals, not construct a barrier. This mission, the superintendent explained on the district website, was an effort to create a “college and career-prepared culture to transform our students’ dreams into reality. But college and career prepared must mean being ready to succeed in post-secondary settings, or our mission will fall short.” District leadership focused on creating a culture where all Ciudad students were prepared for college.

Policy Assumptions. Policies rest on assumptions, theories, and ideologies (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Schnider & Ingram, 1997; Smith, 2004). The makers of this college preparation policy, the district administrators and school board, assumed that schools would implement this initiative as intended and would, therefore, increase college-going rates. However, system actors may not implement the policy as intended (Murphy, 1971; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). For example, not all teachers think students have the ability to go to college, nor do all students think they have the ability to go to college. System actors are integral to the effective implementation of this policy. Perhaps most importantly, this policy assumed, without evidence, that most students in this district have the desire to go to college or pursue some sort of post-secondary education.

Research Questions

Through this study, I sought to better understand the factors that influenced policy implementation in the complex system of an urban high school district. As policies often look different in implementation than in design, I wanted to illustrate possible variations at the school level. Further, I sought to describe the networks of interaction between district and school staff around the mission and its related policies.

I used a mixed methods approach to capture varied perspectives and experiences. I conducted observations, interviews, focus groups, and document review at the district and school levels. For school-level data collection, I focused on two comprehensive high schools in the district. The qualitative portions of the

study were designed to garner an understanding of what the mission meant to system actors and how it had impacted the district and schools, if at all. I also designed a survey for teachers, counselors, principals, and district staff to elicit their definition of the mission and its perceived impact. Surveys for counselors, principals, and district staff included items that could be analyzed using Social Network Analysis (SNA) to capture ties within the network of which individuals regularly discussed the mission and its related policies. Social Network Analysis is a methodological approach that can reveal patterns in relationships and measure network structures (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

The overarching research question was: how do system actors and contexts influence the implementation of a college-going initiative in an urban high school district? Sub-questions included:

- How can system actors' buy-in, knowledge, and interpretation of the mission goals be characterized?
- What roles do different system actors play in implementation?
- How do the interactions of system actors influence implementation?
- What variations exist in how the mission is implemented at the district and school levels?
- To what extent have system actors and schools adapted mission-related programs and policies to fit their contexts?

Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical frame for this study and review related literature. I first situate this case within the context of “college-going”

including the drive for post-secondary enrollment and the role of schools in increasing college-going rates. Further, as this study was approached as a case of policy implementation, I then review the literature on policy implementation and the waves of thinking about how policies are implemented at the local level. Finally, I present the literature for my theoretical framework, complexity theory, and explain how it impacted my conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the methods used in this study, a rationale for the mixed methods design, and a description of the analysis approach. I also provide a description of my positionality and perspective related to this study, as well as considerations for reliability, validity, and generalizability.

Chapter 4 presents the data and findings using assertions and vignettes (Erickson, 1986). Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings as related to the research questions and relevant literature. This final chapter also includes a discussion of conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAME

This phenomenon is understood within the context of college-going initiatives as a case of educational policy implementation. In the following section, I present an overview of the current issues related to college-going and the history of policy implementation research. I then present my theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

College-going

In an economy where knowledge is the most valuable commodity a person and a country have to offer, the best jobs will go to the best educated- whether they live in the United States or India or China. In a world where countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow, the future belongs to the nation that best educates its people. Period. (Obama, 2009a)

These are familiar words. Nearly 30 years prior, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983) alarmed the US public that our education system was failing and therefore our nation's security was at risk. To compete, schools had to do a better job of preparing graduates for the world marketplace. "Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world....We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament," (p.5). Invoking war-like imagery, *A Nation at Risk* presented evidence that the quality of education in our country was declining; consequently, this decline would threaten our standing as a world power.

To combat the “rising tide of mediocrity” in schools, the report recommended, among other things, a core curriculum of four years of English, three years of math, history, and science, and a semester of computer science. Foreign language coursework was recommended for students who aspired to college starting in the elementary grades. These so-called “new basics” would, the report contended, provide students with the skills to help alleviate the risk of the US losing its footing as a world power. *A Nation at Risk*’s inflammatory language and misrepresented data built a picture that our nation’s schools were failing – a sentiment that quickly spread (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). These “CRISIS rhetorics” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 139) paint a uniform picture of a mediocre American education system and masks the disparities and inequities in the system (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Carson, Huelskamp & Woodall, 1993). The issues are more nuanced than that. There is not one story to tell.

In our current economic crisis, the need for high quality graduates is once again a visible policy issue. “Improving education is central to rebuilding our economy” President Barack Obama (2009a) declared in his speech on the Race to the Top initiative. This notion that education can solve broader issues, especially those related to industry, is not new (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). The line of reasoning is that if we have high quality graduates, we will help keep jobs in our country and grow our economic base. The National Center on Education and the Economy (2007), for example, produced a report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, describing changing job needs and its impact on education. The commission asserted that our education system was “built for another era,” (p. 8) one in which

graduates could secure jobs making comfortable middle-class wages with a basic education. These jobs are rapidly vanishing, the report contends, and in order to survive in the global market, our country must restructure the education system to develop creative and critical thinkers capable of the high level positions of the future (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). This narrative that the US is losing its world-class status because of our education system has a long, and often misinformed, history (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

However, in our changing global economy, labor projections show an increasing emphasis on some form of post-secondary education. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Department of Labor (2010) reported that of the 20 fastest growing occupations from 2008-2018, 12 require an associate degree or higher. Further, the percent of jobs requiring some post-secondary education is projected to increase from 29.9% to 31.2% from 2006-2016 (Dohm & Shniper, 2007). In recent estimates, approximately 28%, of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher (US Census Bureau, 2005-2009). Although a college degree is increasingly becoming a requirement to obtain or maintain middle class status (Venzia & Kirst, 2005), it is projected that the majority of jobs in the immediate future will not require a college education (Dohm & Shniper, 2007). This tension influences the implementation of the districts' mission.

In this changing landscape, there is a national push to produce more post-secondary graduates. For example, the Lumina Foundation (2010), a private foundation in Indianapolis, set a goal to increase the percentage of Americans with "high quality" post-secondary credentials to 60% by 2025. According to its

website (<http://www.luminafoundation.org>), the foundation is funding efforts to make college more accessible, especially for low-income and minority students. In his first address as president to the joint session of congress, President Barack Obama (2009b) announced a similar goal that the United States would have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. Given these goals, high schools are facing increasing pressures to prepare students for, and send more students to, college despite the fact that most jobs will not require such degrees. “‘All kids college-ready’ and a host of other clarion calls are heralding a new era of high school reform focused on college readiness and access,” (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009, p. 186). This era presents additional challenges for high schools:

Two somewhat contradictory ideals are at play within contemporary public high schools. A democratic ideal demands that all students be afforded equal educational opportunities, thereby providing equitable prospects for social and economic advancement. The second ideal, related to America’s fervent belief in the value of individual choice, argues that the diversity of students’ interests, efforts, and abilities requires that schools permit students choice among their varied academic offerings. However, allowing choice in virtually any context, by definition, induces variation in the actions and decisions of groups and individuals. Herein rests the contradiction. Do students really have the same opportunities to learn if they are permitted to choose among different courses, unless all courses are equally demanding and contain equally valuable content? (Lee & Ready, 2009, p. 150)

Equality and choice are not mutually exclusive; however, they do present challenges in designing cogent programs. High schools, especially in low-income areas, face dropout challenges. Nationally, approximately 30% of students drop out of school and fail to earn a diploma—but the majority of dropouts are concentrated in urban areas (Editorial Projects in Education, 2010). In addition to

the desire to provide a high quality education to students, schools have an incentive to keep dropout rates low—accountability systems use dropout rates as a measure of school success. This heightened attention encourages schools to focus on keeping students in school and seeing them through graduation. Consequently, schools may offer a more extensive range of courses to keep students engaged instead of instituting a “one size fits all” curricula. Yet, schools may also be motivated to lower graduation requirements to prevent students from dropping out. To ensure equal graduation requirements, all students would be held to these lower requirements.

At the same time, schools focus on preparing students for post-secondary education and attaining high college enrollment rates. To meet this goal, schools have to offer a curriculum aligned with minimum college entrance requirements. In some instances, this means reducing course offerings and limiting curricular experiences to what are deemed “core” subjects for all students. Yet, Berliner and Biddle (1995) pointed out when describing the “core” curricula outlined by *A Nation at Risk*, the choice of what gets included as “core” is arbitrary. Why, for example, would we not want graduates who have taken a more varied set of courses (e.g. foreign language, civics) to lead our country into the global economy?

This consideration is especially relevant given the warnings from the National Center on Education and the Economy (2007) that the jobs of the future will require creative, innovative, and critical thinking. The courses that are deemed “core” may not prepare students for college; other types of courses may

be more important for real world success. Yet, college aspirations can, as a side effect, help encourage students to stay in school because students connect their high school achievement efforts with attaining college and career success (Sagawa & Schramm, 2008). High schools are working to balance choice and equity in an effort to provide opportunities for all students to pursue a college education, if they choose to.

Aspirations are high for college attainment overall, but low-income students report less confidence in their ability to earn a college degree. According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (Rooney, Hussar, Planty, Choy, Hampden-Thompson, Provasnik & Fox, 2006) 51% of low-socioeconomic status (SES) 12th-graders in 2003-2004 expected to earn a bachelor's degree or attend graduate school, compared with 66% of middle-SES seniors and 87% of high-SES seniors. When aspirations were examined by race/ethnicity, 71% of White students, 67% of Black students, 57% of Hispanic students, and 80% of Asian/Pacific Islander students expected to earn a bachelor's degree or attend graduate school (Rooney et al., 2006). In a survey administered in the district used for this study, 80% of 9th graders in 2008 reported that they wanted to go to college. Yet, according to district records, only 44% of students graduating from the district in 2007 entered college.

College enrollment is increasing at a faster rate than in the past. Between 1997 and 2007, enrollment increased 26%, compared to a 14% increase between 1987 and 1997 (Snyder, Dillow & Hoffman, 2009). Minority student enrollment is increasing as well. In 1976, 15% of college students were minorities; in 2007

32% were minorities (Snyder et al., 2009). However, gaps still exist. The immediate college-going rates for students from low-income families are lower than the rates for high-income students (Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, KewalRamani & Kemp, 2008). Low-income students, children whose parents did not go to college, and African American or Latino students are less likely to enroll in college (Perna Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas & Bell, 2008).

Once students enroll in college they face additional challenges. Students who were underprepared for college must enroll in remedial coursework. Nationally, 40% of college students have to take a remedial course (United States Department of Education, 2010). Of the 2010 graduates who took the ACT, 24% met all four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks and, in ACT's estimation, would be prepared for college level courses in English, math, social sciences, and biology (ACT, 2010). The majority of public four-year institutions (75%) and almost all (99%) of two-year colleges offer remedial courses (Boser & Burd, 2009).

Remedial courses can add cost and time to degree attainment. "Inadequate and inequitable preparation for college affects remediation and persistence rates—major problems in post-secondary institutions throughout the country," (Venzia & Kirst, 2005, p. 284). Nationally, according to the U.S. Department of Education Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System, 36% of students who begin a college degree complete it within four years; 57% complete it within six years (as cited in Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp & Tahan, 2011). Of the

students who begin college, many struggle to complete it in a timely manner. Many factors contribute to a student's enrollment in, and completion of, college.

Yet, high schools can most immediately affect college-going rates. In fact, students from low-income, minority families rely heavily on schools to inform them of, and prepare them for, college (McDonough, 2004; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Low-income students have limited access to information about college and often lack the social capital to effectively navigate the system (McDonough, 2004; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Tierney & Jun, 2001; Venezia & Kirst, 2005).

To combat inequalities in college-readiness and access, researchers and policymakers have suggested several interventions. Systemic suggestions include better alignment between the high school and college systems in terms of data, assessments, and standards (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Educational systems are "loosely coupled" (Weick, 1976) and function with a high degree of autonomy; K-12 and higher education systems are treated as separate entities by the government with distinct policies, budgets, governing bodies, and regulations. Some researchers and educational entities suggest aligned PK-16 data systems would allow for more specific feedback on student performance based on common standards (ACT, 2010; Boser & Burd, 2009; Conley, 2005; Roderick et al., 2009; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). However, data system alignment is only one of many proposals to address college-readiness and access issues, and it may not address the root causes of these disparities.

The definition of college-readiness is nebulous. Colleges most commonly use indicators related to the coursework required for college admission, achievement test scores (e.g. SAT, ACT), and grade point averages to define college readiness (Roderick et al., 2009). Student performance on these college-readiness indicators reveals significant racial and ethnic disparities (Roderick et al., 2009). There is broad agreement that schools must build a college culture to develop college-prepared students (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca & Moeller, 2008). College culture has many definitions, but the following was particularly salient.

College culture reflects environments that are accessible to all students and saturated with ever-present information and resources and ongoing formal and informal conversations that help students to understand the various facets of preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from post-secondary academic institutions as those experiences specifically pertain to the students' current and future lives. (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009, p. 26)

There are several key school elements in this definition: accessibility, communication, and support to qualify students to attend and complete post-secondary education.

The role of the school counselor is central to building these college-going elements in schools (McDonough, 2004, 2005). Yet, school counselors balance several roles and face competing priorities (McDonough, 2005; Perna et al., 2008; Venzia & Kirst, 2005). In addition to large case loads, counselors often provide support and information on academic, career, social/emotional issues simultaneously. While they offer important information for students, counselors' efforts alone are not sufficient to build or maintain a college-going culture;

parents and families must be aware of and engaged in the process (Tierney & Jun, 2001; Tierney, 2002; Tierney, Bailey, Constantine, Finkelstein & Hurd, 2009). Further, schools can effectively support student enrollment by laying out clear steps of the process such as how to fill out applications, visit colleges, and apply for financial aid (McDonough, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Tierney et al., 2009). Finally, district and school policies can send clear messages about the importance of college and recognize and incentivize students to prepare for college (Roderick et al., 2009).

Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is the process through which policies are enacted, carried out, or fulfilled. Yet, a precise definition remains elusive. As Levinson and Sutton (2001) observed, “It is easier to define what public policy *is* than what policy *does*,” (p. 5). Implementation is a general term (Hargrove, 1975). Implementation can, for example, be seen as the “ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired results” (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973, p. xxi) or actions of individuals and groups towards the achievement of policy objectives (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). These definitions represent two different phases of the implementation process: 1) setting the implementation strategy in the design and 2) executing the program design (Hargrove, 1975). Both definitions are important in framing implementation as a process that moves from vision to action.

The research on policy implementation has followed three main waves (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 1987; Odden, 1991) and is currently considered to

be in the third wave or generation (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 2006). The first wave in the late 1960s and early 1970s treated implementation as a rational, top-down, administrative process (Honig, 2006a; Odden, 1991). In this wave, researchers established the gap between a policy as intended and a policy as enacted and treated it as an inevitable part of the policy process (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 1987; Odden, 1991). The second wave in the late 1970s and early 1980s delved deeper into the gap to understand the relationship between policy and practice (McLaughlin, 1987). In this wave, researchers paid closer attention to what was implemented over longer periods of time (Honig 2006; Odden, 1991). Policies were being implemented, but through a process of “mutual adaptation” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; McLaughlin, 1976) where macro-level demands were considered within micro-level conditions. The third wave, which began in the mid-1980s and continues to today, focuses on micro-level variability and the effectiveness of policies as implemented (Honig, 2006a; Odden, 1991). This wave acknowledges the complexity of implementation and asks under what conditions, for whom, and in what ways policies are successful (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 2006).

Throughout the waves of policy implementation research, the tensions between rational and irrational, top-down and bottom-up, and policymakers and local implementers have been acknowledged. Fundamentally, the differences between these perspectives are whether or not a policy will unfold as planned, and to what extent that process can be controlled.

In the late 1960s, researchers began studying the effects of the federal Great Society policies such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Honig, 2006a; Odden, 1991). Given the amount of money invested in these programs, Senator Robert Kennedy pushed to require evaluation as a part of ESEA to assess its impact (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). Initially, researchers used administrative frames to study policy that assumed top-down implementation processes as linear, predictable, and rational (McLaughlin, 2006). Policymakers create policy, local agents “carry out” policy, and agencies monitor compliance (Honig, 2006a). The prevailing assumption was that policies would self-implement; policy regulations were enough to dictate implementation (McLaughlin, 1987, 2006). Yet, program evaluations revealed that enacted programs did not match the policy design and implementation gaps existed (Honig, 2006a). This notion surprised federal policymakers (McLaughlin, 2006, 1987). Implementation became the “missing link” (Hargrove, 1975) in the study of policy.

The failure of policy implementation was largely blamed on an inherent conflict between policymaker’s interests and local implementer interests (Boyd, 1987; Odden, 1991). Pressman & Wildavsky (1973), in their groundbreaking work on implementation established the notion that implementation dictated outcomes (McLaughlin, 1987; Smylie & Evans, 2006). Local implementers frequently lacked the will and the capacity to implement the policy as intended (Murphy, 1971; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). In fact, implementation was likened to a “moving target” (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973, p. 176) and became

seen as “inherently unpredictable” (Bardach, 1977, p. 5). As a response, researchers began to develop theories about how to design policy to improve implementation such as providing stronger incentives and more prescriptive implementation directives (Bardach, 1977; Honig, 2006a; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979).

Once researchers established the notion that policies are not enacted as intended, a new generation of research was needed to understand longer-term impacts and how to motivate local implementers (Honig, 2006a; Odden, 1991). It takes time for policy learning and maturation, so policies should be studied in ten year cycles (Sabatier, 1991; Kirst & Jung, 1980). With that time frame in mind, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the ESEA and other large scale federal programs had been in existence long enough to study its impacts. Studies during this time period revealed that long-term policies do, in fact, get implemented with some fidelity and have impacts on local practice (Honig, 2006a; Kirst & Jung, 1980; Odden, 1991).

In the previous wave of implementation research, local actors were seen as lacking the will and capacity to carry out policy. In this wave, the understanding of the conflict between policymakers and local implementers expanded. Implementers were constructed as “engaged actors” in the process (Honig, 2006a, p.6), trying to interpret policy goals and requirements as “street level bureaucrats” (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). Several studies during this period demonstrated that local actors helped adapt federal and state policies into workable programs that engendered local support (Odden, 1991).

Most notably, Milbrey McLaughlin (1976) and the Rand Change Agent study (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978) introduced the idea of a “mutual adaptation” process where local actors incorporated the realities of local (micro) conditions with (external) macro-level regulations. Through this process, both the policy and the implementing institution would adapt to each other. Implementation choices were made in light of the professional expertise, capacity, and conditions of local actors and sites, not just mandated requirements (McLaughlin, 1990). This notion further accentuated the unpredictable relationship between policy and practice. McLaughlin explains, “contrary to the one-to-one relationship assumed to exist between policy and practice, the Change Agent study demonstrated that the nature, amount, and pace of change at the local level was a product of local factors that were largely beyond the control of higher-level policymakers,” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 12). This process of mutual adaptation produces a feasible program that leverages both internal professional expertise and external support structures. Yet, adaptation is not always seen as a positive policy outcome.

Adaptation further underscores the unpredictability of policy implementation. Policymakers want to be able to design policies that produce particular outcomes. As a result, researchers proposed alternative policy design models to try to predict and preempt implementers’ nonconformities to policy plans (Elmore, 1979-1980, 1983; Honig, 2006a; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). Tensions between top-down and bottom-up implementation approaches heightened, and implementation researchers debated the merits of each (deLeon & deLeon, 2002; Sabatier, 1986). Top-down researchers emphasized authoritative,

centrally-defined decisions and policy design to ensure implementation fidelity; bottom-up researchers emphasized the importance of local actors and contextual issues to understand implementation challenges (Fitz, 1994; Matland, 1995). This second wave established the idea “*that* variation in policy, people, and places mattered to implementation. However, studies during this period seldom elaborated *how* they mattered,” (Honig, 2006a, p. 7).

The third wave of implementation research moved beyond how to get programs implemented to how to create successful outcomes (Honig, 2006a; Odden, 1991). Research in this wave acknowledged the trade-offs between compliance and program quality (Odden, 1991) and asserted that policy rules and regulations to encourage fidelity largely overshadowed considerations of program effectiveness and outcomes (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1983; Hargrove, 1983; Odden, 1991). Local actors may adhere to policy mandates, but the policy itself may not be effective. Elmore and McLaughlin (1983) characterize this as a “failure to distinguish between competence and compliance,” (p. 325). Further, the definition of “effective implementation” differs in various local settings and produces different practices (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; McLaughlin, 1987, 2006).

Researchers in the third wave more closely examined micro-level actors, issues, and constraints and the resulting impacts on policy outcomes (Honig, 2006a; Odden, 1991). This era of research more concretely established that a policy changes as it moves through layers of the system (McLaughlin, 1987, 2006). The policy as enacted inside the system is more important to understand than the policy as intended from outside the system (McLaughlin, 2006). The

micro-level is important to unpack because individual interpretations and understandings of policy goals shape implementation (McLaughlin, 2006; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006). Implementers may not intentionally resist or change a policy; they may simply have different interpretations of policy goals and intent (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). To better understand how to create effective policy outcomes, then, we must better understand implementers' interpretations of policy goals.

The simple explanation of implementation issues as a lack of capacity and will is no longer sufficient (Odden, 1991). Policies and systems are more complex, as are the understandings of the policy implementation process (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 2006). In fact, "the complex, powerful and multifaceted nature of the implementation process now is taken-for-granted," (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 216). Variability is the rule in implementation, not the exception (Honig, 2006a; Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008). Individual, social, and organizational factors contribute to the variability in the pace or content of implementation (Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008). The multifaceted context within which implementation resides includes the relationships between policy, people, and places (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 2006). These factors combine to create unique contexts and challenges in policy implementation. In this wave of implementation research, complexity in terms of multi-layer and multi-actor issues must be considered.

As this wave continues into the next decade, several questions remain. First, the definition of effective implementation remains vague (McLaughlin,

2006). McLaughlin (2006) poses several questions about how to define effective implementation: Is it compliance and fidelity? Can it include unintended benefits from implementers' actions? Is success determined by some ultimate outcome? With the understandings developed from previous waves of implementation research, this generation of policy implementation researchers can further examine under which conditions, for whom, and why policies are successful (Honig, 2006a). Nuanced understandings of systems research and organizational learning can help researchers understand the complexity of policy implementation (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 2006). Finally, though we know information sharing is central to school improvement processes (O'Day, 2002), how interactions and information sharing between system actors shape policy implementation in a complex system remains a question.

Theoretical Framework

Complexity theory, a growing theory in organizational studies, provides a framework to understand-though not predict- systemic change in this study. Complexity theory examines patterns of action and relations, system influences, and local adaptation to outside issues and pressures (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). As an approach, complexity theory is primarily concerned with internal processes and how those are shaped by influences within and outside of the system (Davis & Sumara, 2006).

Influenced by evolutionary biology, physics, information systems, and mathematical theory, complexity rejects rational, linear, reductionist approaches to examining phenomena (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Davis & Sumara, 2006;

Morrison, 2002). Instead, complexity theory offers a multifaceted, layered approach to capture ‘complex systems’ or “a world in which many players are all adapting to each other and where the emerging future is very hard to predict,” (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000, xi). The future is hard to predict because complex systems have multiple components whose interactions influence the system in different ways (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Davis & Sumara, 2006). Individual components function together through complex webs of connections and spheres of influence (Morrison, 2002). In complexity theory, the whole is “greater than the sum of the parts” (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2002).

The Santa Fe Institute, a research institute founded by scientists from the Los Alamos National Laboratory, furthered the advancement of complex systems thinking in the 1980s (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Morrison, 2005). Complexity theory is still in its infancy. It, in fact, lacks a standardized definition (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Davis & Sumara, 2006). Essentially, complexity is a theory of evolution and survival (Morrison, 2002) and builds on principles of self-organization and emergence. Complexity’s core concepts focus on individual and collective behavior and their relation to interactions, variation, selection, and adaptation within a system (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000).

The interplay between individual and collective behavior helps define complexity theory (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Morrison, 2002; O’Day, 2002). Individual agents are simultaneously influencing, and being influenced by, the larger system. The unit of analysis in complexity theory is the system; individual agents and subunits can have meaningful impacts on the system, but they function

as part of the whole. In a complex system, the interests of individuals and the collective are considered at the same time in an attempt to balance both perspectives (Davis & Sumara, 2006).

Interactions between agents create a web of influence which shapes the development of the system. Individual understandings shape collective understanding; conversely, collective coherence shapes individual agent's actions (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2002). My ideas influence yours; your ideas influence mine; and our ideas influence (and are influenced by) the system as a whole. A complex system often has a distributed knowledge system because connections and multiple sources of information are vital to system survival (Morrison, 2002).

However, some individuals may have more influence in shaping the collective; in a complex system those individuals may or may not have formal authority (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2002). Rather, interaction patterns dictate influence (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; O'Day, 2002). First, agents who are close in proximity are more apt to share ideas (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Morrison, 2002). Second, some agents interact more than others and thus have more influence (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Third, some agents have more perceived relevance or importance, so their ideas are more readily embraced by others (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Morrison, 2002). Because of these varying degrees of influence, effects cannot be predicted. As Axelrod and Cohen (2000) explain, "The overall effect of events can be unforeseeable if their consequences diffuse

unevenly via the interaction patterns within the system,” (p.14). This unevenness is but one source of variation within a system.

Variation is a key component of a complex system. “Without variation among the agents of a system or in the surrounding environment, there is little information on which to act,” (O’Day, 2002, p. 298). Variation provides new ideas, new perspectives, and new experiences. Diversity and variation can manifest as types of agents, strategies they employ, or contextual issues (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; O’Day, 2002). For example, agents from different levels of a system (e.g. teachers, students, district staff) respond to changes in different ways or have different understandings of information. Their reactions and interpretations influence others. Because each agent has his or her own understanding, the way they communicate information will vary (O’Day, 2002).

Variety is, in fact, required for adaptation of a system (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). McGinn (1996) explains, “Human, as well as physical, systems lose energy over time and can only survive and thrive by increasing organizational complexity, that is, by increasing both internal diversity and integration. Systems die when their membership becomes too homogenous to respond to a changing environment,” (p. 356). Variety encourages responsive change as agents learn from each other and borrow strategies.

Agents choose which strategies to adopt and replicate in a process of selection. These choices are not inconsequential; they can change the structure of the organization and what can be achieved (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Systems can copy, recombine, or create strategies in an effort to evolve and improve on

some measure of success (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Of course, identifying the appropriate measure of success is important and will affect which strategies are selected. This process of selecting strategies is not always beneficial to the system; systems can choose the wrong strategies or the wrong agents (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Further, contextual issues can greatly influence how a strategy works. Similar initial conditions produce dissimilar outcomes (Morrison, 2002). In other words, results cannot be replicated, even in similar contexts. Different agents, different interconnections, and different organizational cultures have meaningful influences on how strategies work in a system and the extent to which they produce learning and improvement.

A central tenant of complexity theory is that exchanges between individuals help create collective learning and adaptation. Adaptation, as defined by Axelrod and Cohen (2000), is when selection of strategies leads to “improvement along some measure of success,” (p. 7). Adaptation is similar to organizational learning (O’Day, 2002). Organizational learning requires an ability to adapt to the environment, including mechanisms to generate new information, structures and organizational features that ultimately lead to long-term survival (McMaster, 1996). Adaptation is survival. However, in a complex system, learning and change are not automatically deemed adaptation (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). A system can change some aspect that may lead to improvement in one area, but decline in another (O’Day, 2002). Further, adaptation includes improvement on a measure of success; yet, measures of success are not always similarly defined within a system (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Even if an

organization has defined measures of success, individual agents may interpret them differently. What is adaptation for one agent may just be change to another (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Finally, as agents revise their strategies to adjust to their environment, they are also changing the organizational context (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Members of an organization are both creating and reacting to the organizational culture. Complexity theory recognizes that systems want to stay in equilibrium, but the system will change for survival. Equilibrium stunts learning; stable organizations fail (Stacey, 1992).

Relationship of Complexity Theory to Other Frameworks. In this section, I examine relevant theories related to the central tenants of complexity theory-interaction, variation, selection, and adaptation.

Interaction is the concept with the most related theories. In complexity theory, meaning is best understood by examining interactions between individual parts in the context of the whole. The idea of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts has direct connections to Gestalt psychology and the principle of totality. Kurt Lewin (1951) built on the Gestalt principle of totality and proposed the idea that behavior is determined based on both the person and the environment. Lewin's field theory has an explicit connection to the holistic nature of complexity theory.

Another aspect of interaction is the relationship between agents and systems. Morrison (2005) established the explicit connections between Bourdieu's principle of habitus and structuring structures (1977, 1986), Giddens' theory of structuration (1984), and complexity theory. These theories are all

concerned with agency and structure and how those two concepts intertwine within systems. Bourdieu (1986) describes how individual social and cultural knowledge, or habitus, affect everyday behaviors. Humans are not merely the object of structures; they have freedom to act and create, and that can create uncertainty in behavior. Habitus, then, is a combination of cognition, perception, and action within a social context (Fuchs, 2008). Change can occur through habitus, just as change can occur through agency in Giddens's model.

Giddens's theory of structuration (1984) suggests a model where agents take actions that transform the system in a balance between agency and structure and micro- and macro-perspectives within a particular social and cultural context. Yet, to what extent is agency creating structure and vice versa? As Broadfoot (2001) explains, "We need to engage with the reflexive relationship between structure and action that has long been the central challenge of social science; to explore how far individuals create reality and how far they are created by it," (p. 99). Organizational, local, regional, national, and even global cultures take central roles as mediators for change. Yet, in both Bourdieu and Giddens's models, change is cyclical and social structures are reproduced. Complexity theory, however, goes beyond explaining reproduction of existing systems to describe production of a system with unpredictable outcomes (Morrison, 2005).

Variation creates an environment where different perspectives and strategies emerge to enhance system survival. As McLaughlin explains, "Variability is not only inevitable in social policy settings, it is desirable. Local responses generate a vast natural experiment – combinations and permutations of

practice that highlight niches for intervention and promising solutions,” (1987, p. 176). Education systems have unique aspects that harness variation. Karl Weick’s (1976) concept of “loose coupling” in educational organizations is particularly important to the concept of variation. In loosely coupled systems, units retain separate identities and have weak, infrequent, or superficial interactions. Education systems typify this type of coupling. Districts have varying connections to schools, dictating some elements of schools’ activities, but without direct day-to-day monitoring. Further, schools within a district may only have occasional interactions with each other. Loose coupling allows for greater variation of strategies because my action may not determine your action if we are not closely coupled. Loose coupling can buffer a system from complete failure, but it can also prevent improvement (O’Day, 2002).

Selection is the process of identifying the strategies and agents in an effort to achieve some measure of success (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). In education, success is a moving target. Though student achievement is arguably the ultimate measure of success, how achievement is defined changes over time and in different contexts. In loosely coupled systems, a standard or measuring stick cannot, or is not, applied evenly across the system. There is no definite mechanism that weeds out the good ideas, strategies, or actors from the bad ones. In fact, the strategies that spread are not often the most effective strategies. Strategies may be dictated by exogenous or endogenous factors (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000).

Exogenous factors, or external pressures, can dictate the strategies used in a system. No Child Left Behind, for example, was a policy that attempted to create an educational environment where state-wide tests provided a weeding out process of the ineffective strategies, agents, or subsystems. It was essentially an environmental selection process. School reform efforts try to mandate change. Yet, school reform is a cyclical and often slow process, providing a stream of “steady work,” (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). There are, in fact, few “slam bam” policy effects (Cronbach, 1982). As a system, education revisits the same strategies over and over with differing levels of success. There is no playbook of effective strategies that can be uniformly applied in a loosely coupled education system. Further complicating the issue, what works in one school or district may not work in another because of contextual issues (Berliner, 2002).

There are also endogenous dynamics in human systems that determine if a strategy will or will not continue. For example, peer networks influence which strategies are supported and integrated into the organizational culture (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2002). Ideally, this would manifest in coherence around measures of success, effective strategies, and ultimate goals. Fullan (2001) explains, “People stimulate, inspire, and motivate each other to contribute and implement best ideas, and best ideas mean greater overall coherence,” (p. 118). In most systems, competing definitions of success emerge, strategies are more or less measured against these, and strategies are given support or allowed to wither. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) describe, tinkering, or gradual change, in school

reform is a way of retaining valuable strategies and discarding strategies that do not work. Selection can help preserve the system.

Adaptation, when selection of strategies leads to success on some measure, is difficult to demonstrate in education. As described by Axelrod and Cohen (2000), adaptation for one agent may just be change to another; this is especially relevant to education since competing priorities mediate measures of success. The notion that change itself is not adaptation is familiar to education. Tyack and Cuban (1995) explain, “Change, we believe, is not synonymous with progress. Sometimes preserving good practices in the face of challenges is a major achievement, and sometimes teachers have been wise to resist reforms that have violated their professional judgment,” (p.5). For the system to survive and effectively adapt, the most effective strategies must be retained. Coherence again becomes an important concept. On which measure of success does the system want to excel? What will lead to adaptation and, essentially, system survival? Complexity theory provides multiple lenses to describe phenomena. Its application to studies of educational systems is palpable.

Current Applications of Complexity Theory to Education. Perhaps because of the constant search for the “one best way” to educate, a search for “magic bullets,” educational researchers have been slow to adopt complexity thinking; yet complexity theory is applicable to educational practice and research as educational systems are not linear and predictable (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Osberg & Biesta, 2010). In fact, Fullan (2001) concludes that effective school leaders must understand complexity science. Schools exhibit many features of

complex systems--they are non-linear, unpredictable, and have to respond to the external environment (Morrison, 2005).

Further, complexity thinking has practical implications for educators. Instead of simply describing phenomenon, complexity theory can be used to harness innovation and adaptation (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2002). Keith Morrison is perhaps the most prolific writer in the use of complexity theory in education. Specifically, he has described how school leaders can use complexity theory to create higher functioning organizations (Morrison, 2002). For example, Morrison suggests school leaders function as facilitators of information exchange, not gatekeepers, to encourage interdependence and distributed networks of knowledge. School leaders, he argues, should rely on distributed knowledge and draw upon it to enable and empower others.

Complexity theory has also been applied to curriculum and pedagogy (see Doll, 1989). However, little work has been done to use complexity theory to examine education policy or the politics of education (Maroulis, Guimer, Petry, Stringer, Gomez, Amaral & Wilensky, 2010; Osberg & Biesta, 2010). In fact, system learning has been absent in considerations of educational policy implementation (McLaughlin, 2006). As my interest is in policy implementation, and specifically the systemic factors that mitigate or facilitate implementation, this study was a unique opportunity to apply complexity theory in a new and engaging way.

As a theoretical framework, complexity theory provides a lens to describe the multiple layers and linkages of policy implementation. At its most basic level, complexity theory challenges linear thinking. In fact, the definition of complexity is when we do not know and cannot predict what actions are possible or what consequences the actions will produce (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). In policy implementation, we do not know the full consequences or how a policy will take shape in different settings. Policy implementation, then, would always be complex. However, policies are often written as simple dictates of action.

Complexity theory posits that “similar initial conditions produce dissimilar outcomes,” (Morrison, 2002, p. 9). Instead of assuming one can predict an outcome, complexity theory offers post hoc explanations of change (Davis & Sumara, 2006). “Complexity research gives us a grounded basis for inquiring where the ‘leverage points’ and significant trade-offs of a complex system may lie. It also suggests what kinds of situations may be resistant to policy intervention, and when small interventions may be likely to have large effects,” (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000, p. 21). Though complex systems may produce different outputs from similar inputs, learning from one system can help understand the dynamics of another system. The key elements-such as the structure of a system, the nature of its internal connections, and the conditions surrounding strategy selection-could be similar across systems.

Further, that there is a connection between these elements is not unique. For example, a structure of distributed leadership will influence strategy selection. The nature of these two elements will differ in different contexts, but the link

between these elements will be important to examine in most systems. In this way, learning from one system can inform another system, as well as the larger policy implementation field.

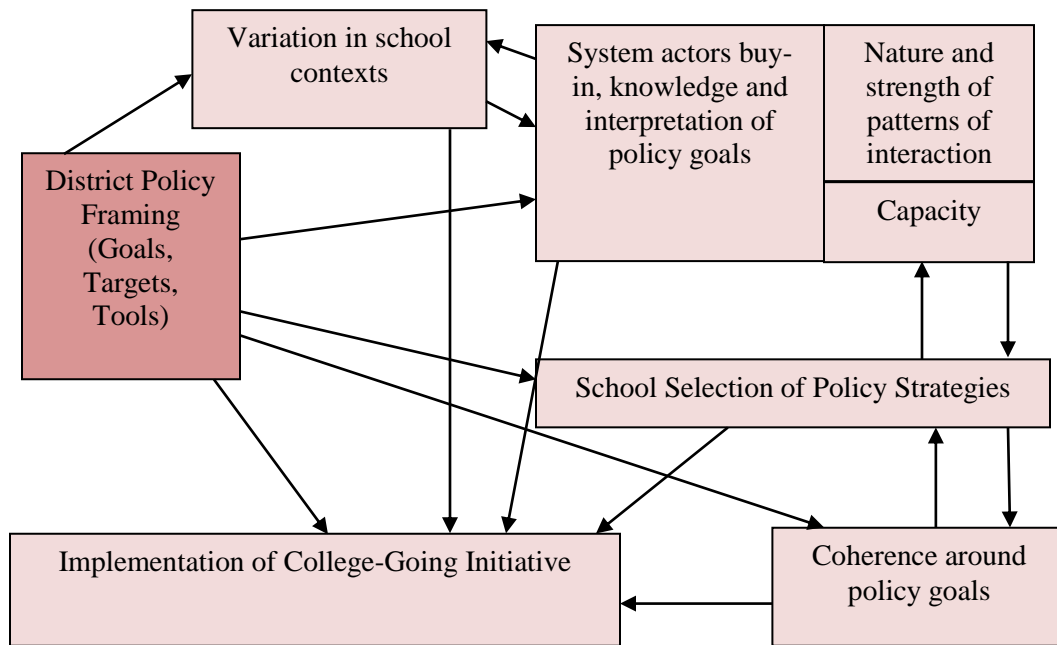
Change, viewed through complexity theory, emphasizes interaction and interdependence. Each participant in an organization influences, and is influenced by, other participants. These connections and interactions both maintain stability (by inculcating others to how things are done) and create the conditions for change (through the sharing of new ideas) (O'Day, 2002). In complex systems, information changes as it is “interpreted based on prior experience, recombined with other information and knowledge, and passed on through interaction with others,” (O'Day, 2002, p. 299).

This process of sharing information is particularly relevant to the study of policy implementation. As McLaughlin (1987) and others noted, policies morph as they move through the system—complexity theory offers a frame to understand how and why these mutations happen. Davis and Sumara (2006) further explain, “Within a structure-determined complex system, external authorities cannot impose, but merely condition or occasion possibilities. The system itself ‘decides’ what is and is not acceptable,” (p. 145). Complexity theory, combined with current understanding of policy implementation, will provide a strong theoretical and conceptual framework for my study.

This study did not seek to test complexity theory; rather, complexity theory was used as a lens to inform the conceptual framework (Figure 1) and

study design. As complexity theory has implications for policy implementation and systemic change, it was an important contribution to the study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Ciudad's Policy Implementation



In this framework, implementation is not a dichotomous notion; rather, implementation varies as a result of local contexts, system actors, interactions between actors, selection of policy strategies, and coherence around policy goals. Contextual issues include the demographic makeup of a school, its history, levels of academic achievement, competing priorities, and prevailing goals. The system's actors influence the strategies selected to enact a policy – in both the individual and collective sense. System actors' buy-in, knowledge, and interpretation of policy goals influences (and is influenced by) the nature and strength of interactions between system actors. Further, a school's capacity to enact strategies influences the selection of strategies. Coherence around policy goals is influenced by the selection of strategies and the individual and collective

contributions to them. These concepts were used to understand this case of policy implementation.

These negotiations and interconnections are well-supported in the literature on policy implementation. McLaughlin's (1987) work on local adaptation and system actors is very relevant to this frame. She and others have identified several facilitating and mitigating factors including:

- Are there other initiatives that take precedence or have been in place for longer and therefore have more implementation support and resources?
- How do schools and school staff operationalize the policy? Their capacity and will to do so can greatly affect the implementation of this policy.
- The variability of school contexts and interpretations of system actors will likely morph the policy to fit the local needs of the school. These mutations may contribute to or limit the implementation of the policy.

Policy implementation research tends to conceive policy as being formed externally from a higher governmental organization such as the federal or state government. It is important to note that, in this case, the policy I am studying is locally derived at the district level; however, the district represents the higher governmental organization and perhaps the will of the American people. The schools are the on-the-ground implementers. The same issues and tensions arise that are described in policy implementation literature, especially because this is a site-based district with loose coupling and strong local control.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the methodological approach of this study to answer the overarching research question: how do system actors and contexts influence the implementation of a college-going initiative in an urban high school district?

The purpose of this study was to understand who and what influenced policy implementation in a complex system. I undertook this study because it was an interesting case of policy implementation in an urban high school district. I was also interested in this study because of my personal knowledge and experience as a former teacher and current educational researcher. I have been the target of policies and an evaluator of policies. My experience on either side of policy implementation provided me with a unique perspective. As a researcher and evaluator, stakeholders were often interested in whether or not the policy was being implemented, as if implementation was a static and dichotomous notion. As a teacher, I experienced, first hand, how policies changed at the local level because of the influence of system actors.

The policy making and policy implementation process is fraught with ambiguity, power struggles, and negotiations. As I began this study, I assumed these issues would affect the implementation of the policy and system actors' perceptions of it. Further, I assumed that schools would implement the policy differently depending on their context, local factors, and internal structures. I also assumed the district was implementing this policy to improve their services to

students; not as a response to a direct external pressure, though external pressures to increase college-going rates did exist.

There were multiple layers to the initiative that started at the district (e.g. the mission statement, supports and pressures), moved to the school (operationalizing the initiative, providing opportunities for students to explore post-secondary education options), and ended with the students (making informed choices, seeking out opportunities, and making decisions about their desires for post-secondary education). As McLaughlin (1987) stated, “The relevant frame of analysis is the implementing system, not a discrete program or project,” (p. 175). Therefore, my unit of study was the policy implementation from the district to the school levels. Both levels were essential to understand the phenomenon. A multi-layered phenomenon needed a multiple method research approach.

Suitability of a Mixed Methods Approach

As this phenomenon included multiple layers and actors, a mixed methods design with a significant qualitative portion was the best approach to answer my research questions. This type of design allowed me to include a range of perspectives from those instrumental to and affected by the policy. Further, a mixed methods design provided opportunities for understanding different aspects of the phenomenon. For example, surveys provided a broad perspective on what principals thought about the policy while interviews elicited information about the role principals believed they had in the policy implementation.

While there are many definitions of mixed methods, I used the following definition by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) to guide my design and analysis:

Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. (p. 5).

Mixed method designs allow for a comprehensive view of a phenomenon and various perspectives about it. As Mary Lee Smith (1986) explained, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a situation where “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts,” (p. 37). Quantitative and qualitative data reveal different parts of the story; mixing these methods provides a more holistic view of the phenomenon.

I approached this study through an analytic inductive frame where quantitative and qualitative data were given equal weight and analyzed together to create a holistic perspective. Geertz (1974) describes “dialectical tacking” in mixed methods to capture both the experience near (particular) and experience far (general). This integration of local and global perspectives is a unique benefit of mixed methods designs. Greene (2007) noted, “The primary purpose of a study conducted with a mixed methods way of thinking is to better understand the complexity of the social phenomena being studied,” (p. 20).

Mixed methods provided the most comprehensive approach to understand the phenomenon from both micro- and macro-level perspectives. System actors’ motives and interpretations are best captured through qualitative methods, as are describing local policy strategies. Yet, school contexts can be examined both

quantitatively and qualitatively. For example, some school context questions can be described quantitatively: How do the schools differ demographically? How many students have gone to college in each school? What are student passage rates on the state exam? Yet, there are some aspects of school context that defy numeration. How does the school feel? Is it an open place where students are comfortable and open dialogue exists? Is it a place where test score pressures take precedence over this policy more so than other sites? How do teachers and students characterize their school? The qualitative data provided insight into the micro-level of the individual and school; the quantitative data provided an understanding of the macro-level of the district.

To answer the research questions, I used surveys, document review, and extant data review (e.g. student achievement data, college-going rates) in tandem with observations, interviews, and focus groups. These data provided different perspectives on the phenomenon. For example, the nature and strength of interaction between system actors could be examined quantitatively and qualitatively. To best understand the content of interactions and the roles of system actors, qualitative data would provide the most insight. The pattern of interactions between system actors, however, would best be understood quantitatively.

Mixed methods provided me with various perspectives and information about the phenomenon and how system actors reacted to it. Further, multiple data collection methods helped me triangulate the data and assess meanings. Multiple

methods also provided opportunities for divergent themes, disconfirming evidence, and multiple perspectives to emerge.

Though many researchers have acknowledged the methodological benefits of mixed methods designs, some have argued that mixing methods present paradigm and epistemological conflicts (Smith, 1986). Though I acknowledge this inherent conflict, I believe in the power of mixing paradigms and perspectives. This mixing is also known as a dialectical position where new meanings and perspectives can be nurtured through mixed methods (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Greene and Caracelli (1997) assert that a dialectical approach represents a “balanced, reciprocal relationship between paradigms and practice,” (p. 12). Mixed methods, coupled with complexity theory, constructs an intricate yet practical model. Complexity theory relies on a mix of micro- and macro-perspectives and problematizes taken-for-granted assumptions. As such, a mixed methods design complemented the theoretical framework.

Data Sources

To accomplish what Geertz (1973) termed “thick description” I gathered data from a variety of key system actors – not just one set of actors. Though I was not able to go deeply into each actor’s experience, collectively I have a thick description of the implementation of this policy in two schools and at the district level. System actors provided varying perspectives and described different processes in relation to the mission’s implementation. These system actors included:

- District leadership (e.g. superintendent, assistant superintendent)

- District staff (e.g. curriculum manager)
- Union Representative
- Principals
- Counselors
- Teachers
- Senior-level students in each selected school

Additional data sources included documents (e.g. meeting notes, informational letters, brochures, websites), extant data (e.g. district and school demographics, district and school achievement data), and observations (e.g. classroom instruction, school board meetings, school leadership meetings). These data provided additional context for my study; specifically, it provided more information on the policy components and assumptions. How was the problem defined? What goals are prioritized? What rhetoric was used to situate the policy in this time and place? These additional data sources also helped me identify areas to discuss in interviews and focus groups.

School Selection. For school-level data collection, I selected two comprehensive high schools in Ciudad. Another doctoral student was also interested in the mission change in Ciudad; with the permission of our committees, we conducted data collection as a team. This teaming reduced the burden on the district and schools for participating in our studies and allowed us to conduct more interviews than we would have on our own. I worked with my research partner to select the two schools for our studies. We chose schools that were doing something to implement the mission. Further, we recruited schools

that were comprehensive high schools and had had students since the inception of the mission. We wanted to study schools that had a diverse student body, similar to the district overall. We selected schools that had average student academic performance compared to the district overall; however, we were also looking for one school that had experienced some success in terms of increased college-going rates or decreased dropout rates. We did not want to select schools that were unusually high performing or low performing. Finally, it was important that the principals in the selected schools were amenable to participating in the study. We selected two high schools: Plaza and Mercado.

Plaza High School was a large, comprehensive high school with over 2,000 students. It was one of the oldest schools in Ciudad. Several Plaza staff, when asked to describe their school, referred to Plaza as “inner city.” The student population was predominantly Hispanic (64%), followed by African American (12%), Caucasian (11%), Asian (7%), and Native American (6%) students. The school had a smaller Hispanic population, and larger percentages of students in all other ethnic categories, than the district overall. Further, the school had a sizable population of refugee students from countries such as Cuba, Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan. The school received Title I funds.

According to preliminary 2010-2011 rates, Plaza’s four year graduation rate dropped from 83% in 2009-2010 to 73% in 2010-2011. The district’s overall preliminary graduation rates were 76.1% in 2010-2011, down slightly from the previous year rate of 78.5%. Plaza’s dropout rates increased as well from 2.6% in 2009-2010 to a preliminary rate of 3.5% in 2010-2011. The district’s preliminary

dropout rate for 2010-2011 was 3.6%, an increase from the previous year's rate of 2.2%. The school's average ACT composite score in 2009-2010 was 15.7 while the district's was 15.8.

As assessed by state performance labels, out of a possible five categories, Plaza earned a label of "Performing Plus" which was the third highest label. Plaza's performance was similar to the district's on the state exam for reading and math; 48% of Plaza students passed math and 68% passed reading. The school failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind for several years and was, in 2010-2011, in Corrective Action.

Mercado High School was one of the smaller comprehensive high schools in Ciudad with less than 2,000 students. Students did not have to test in to the school or otherwise qualify to attend Mercado, though it contained a large magnet vocational program. Some students attended the school only in the afternoons for a particular vocational program but attended another school for core academics. The student population was overwhelmingly Hispanic (94%), followed by Caucasian (3%), African American (2%), Native American (1%) and Asian (1%) students. The school had a larger Hispanic population than the district overall (78%). Though there were no specific figures, staff estimated that 30%-40% of the school population were undocumented immigrants, primarily from Mexico. The school received Title I funds.

According to preliminary 2010-2011 rates, Mercado's four year graduation rate increased from 75.4% in 2009-2010 to a preliminary rate of 92.2% in 2010-2011, well above the district average of 76.1%. Mercado High School

was one of only four schools in the district to increase its graduation rates from 2009-2010 and was the school that had the largest increase. Mercado's dropout rate slightly increased from .4% in 2009-2010 to a preliminary rate of .7% in 2010-2011, though it was well below the district's rate of 3.6%. The school's average ACT composite score in 2009-2010 was 16.2, slightly above the district average of 15.8.

According to the state performance labels, out of a possible five categories, the school earned a label of "Performing Plus" which was the third highest label. The school met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and was one of only two comprehensive high schools in the district to do so. Mercado students scored higher than the district average of the state exam for both reading and math; 58% of Mercado students passed math and 79% passed reading.

Mercado had previously been a comprehensive high school opened in the 1950s, but because of declining enrollment, in the 1980s the school was shut down. It re-opened as Mercado in the mid-1980s as a vocational institute. It became a comprehensive high school several years later.

The two schools had some similarities in terms of a high minority population, Title I status, solid achievement, and deliberate efforts towards the mission. However, the two schools were also quite different in focus and some outcomes (e.g. graduation rates, state test scores). The similarities and differences between the two schools made for interesting cases to compare and contrast.

Participant Selection. In order to answer my research questions, I had to garner participation from a wide variety of system actors. Consequently, I reached out to a large number of district and school staff.

I began the study in spring 2010 with a set of five district staff and leaders. I selected these district representatives because of their participation in policies and programs related to the mission. District-level interviews included the superintendent, an assistant superintendent, a curriculum specialist, a lead counselor for the district, and the former superintendent. Data from these interviews informed the subsequent phases of the study and were included in the full analysis. In spring 2011, my research partner and I interviewed district leaders including the superintendent and a new assistant superintendent. A union representative was also interviewed as part of the district-wide data collection effort. Further, in spring 2011, I surveyed all district leaders, as well as staff from the curriculum department. Of the 13 district staff and leaders, nine responded to the survey corresponding to a 69% response rate.

At the school level, principals, counselors, teachers, and students participated in interviews, focus groups, and surveys in spring 2011. In mid-April 2011, I invited all principals, counselors, and teachers in the district to participate in an online survey. The survey links were active through the first week of June 2011. I sent emails directly to principals and counselors through the survey software Qualtrics with a unique link to the survey for each participant. I sent two follow-up invitations to non-respondents. Out of the 16 principals in the district, 12 responded to the survey for a 75% response rate. Of the 81 counselors in the

district, 47 responded (58%). The district research office sent an email on my behalf to all teachers in the district with an open link, supported by Qualtrics software, to take the survey anonymously. The district sent one reminder to all teachers in the district to remind them of my study and the invitation to participate. Of the 1,677 teachers invited to participate in a survey, 231 (14%) chose to participate.

For the qualitative data collection efforts at the school level, participants in the two selected schools were invited to participate in the study. My research partner and I chose to interview the principals and at least four counselors in each school as they were key implementers of the policy. We conducted the principal interviews together and split the counselor interviews. Further, we wanted to conduct student focus groups with a small group of seniors from each school. Finally, I chose to also conduct teacher focus groups at each school to complement my survey data collection efforts.

At Plaza, my research partner and I interviewed the principal and six counselors. All but one counselor at the school chose to participate in interviews. My research partner recruited students to participate in the focus group from the courses she observed for her own research. She secured the participation of five students at Plaza; however, only one student showed up for the scheduled group. So, the student focus group was conducted with that one student as an interview. To recruit participants for my teacher focus group, the professional development leader for the school sent two emails on my behalf to the entire teaching cadre to

invite their participation in my study. Seven teachers signed up for the focus group; four teachers showed up on the day of the group.

At Mercado, we interviewed the principal and four counselors. All but one counselor chose to participate in the interviews. My research partner recruited eight students from the classroom she was observing to participate in a student focus group; five students showed up, but one student chose to leave before the focus group began. To recruit teachers for my focus group, the assistant principal sent out an email on my behalf. Seven teachers agreed to participate, and six showed up for the focus group.

Limitations with Participant Selection. As the surveys were sent to the population of district leaders, principals, counselors, and teachers, and had strong response rates, there were few limitations with the survey participant selection. However, for the Social Network Analysis items, non-respondents posed a potential issue. Though I had sufficient data to conduct SNA, if a key actor did not respond, it could have affected the overall network structure. After reviewing the data, there were only two actors named by a large number of respondents who did not respond to the survey. This would not have a significant impact on the network structure or measures.

Both principals and all but two counselors invited for interviews participated. However, important limitations occurred with focus group selection. First, to adhere with the school's requests and our research guidelines, we were limited to the students in the classes my research partner observed who were seniors and over the age of 18. Though we tried to recruit a diverse student group

in terms of gender, ethnicity, and achievement levels, all students who chose to participate in both schools were male. At Mercado, most of the students were in honors courses, which may have represented certain experiences and concerns. However, the overall mix of students who participated in the focus groups largely represented the diverse student body. Teacher focus group recruitment was limited to contacts through school administrators. This may have affected who chose to participate in the focus groups. Further, all teachers who participated in the focus group at Plaza were male. However, at Mercado, all but two teachers who participated were female. While I did not explicitly collect information related to teachers' ethnicity and age, the groups appeared to closely resemble the staff at both schools in terms of ethnicity and age.

Data Collection

In this section I describe the data collection methods used in this study. This study was reviewed and approved by Arizona State University's Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (Appendix A). I used mixed methods to understand the phenomenon from various perspectives and levels of analysis. The quantitative methods (surveys, extant data) provided more general contextual information while the qualitative methods (observations, interviews, document review) provided more particular and detailed perspectives. The research questions included:

1. How do system actors and contexts influence the implementation of a college-going initiative in an urban high school district?

- a. How can system actors' buy-in, knowledge, and interpretation of the policy goals be characterized?
- b. What roles do different system actors play in implementation?
- c. How do the interactions of system actors influence implementation?
- d. What variations exist in how the mission is implemented at the district and school levels?
- e. To what extent have system actors and schools adapted mission-related programs and policies to fit their contexts?

My data collection methods were as follows:

Research Questions	Method	Respondents
1, a, b	Observations	District and school staff (superintendent meeting with principals and leadership (1), school board meetings (4), school staff meetings (3), classroom walk-throughs (15))
1, a, b, c, d, e	Interviews	District leadership and staff (6), Union Representative (1), Principals of each selected school (2), Counselors in each selected school (10)
1, a, b, c, d, e	Focus Groups	Teachers (4-7 in each school), Students (1-4 in each school)

1, c, d, e	Surveys	District staff (9), principals (12), counselors (47), and teachers (231)
1, d	Extant Data	Data on school demographics, college entrance rates, Honors/Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate enrollment, ACT scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and state exam passage rates
1, b, d	Document Review	Policy documents, meeting agendas and notes, brochures, newsletters, 20 student education plans (4+4 Plans) from the focus schools

Observations. In order to gain a broad perspective on the mission and its implementation, I observed several meetings and conducted classroom walk-throughs.

I observed four school board meetings (February-May 2011) to understand district issues that may have affected the policy and its implementation. I also observed a meeting in February, 2011 of the district professional learning community comprised of principals and district staff held at Plaza High School. At this meeting, I was a participant observer, taking part in the activities including classroom walk-throughs and providing feedback on walk-throughs to the principal of the school. At this meeting, I was particularly interested in the interactions between the principals and the district leaders.

At the school level, I observed instructional cabinet meetings at both focus schools in March and April, 2011. These meetings included department chairs and school administrators (e.g. assistant principals, principal). In these meetings, staff discussed school issues and concerns as well as initiatives and programs. These meetings were important to understand contextual issues at the school, as well as to observe interactions between teachers and administrators. Further, I observed a school improvement meeting at Plaza in March, 2011 that focused on the implementation of the school's new curricular program. I also conducted classroom walk-throughs in each school to get a feel for the school. I spent approximately 3-5 minutes in each classroom and took notes about the content of instruction, the feel of the class, and the appearance of college-going materials or themes. I used observations to provide confirming and disconfirming evidence of my inferences, to seize opportunities to see system actors interact with each other and the content of the policy, and to gain further insight into the implementation of this policy.

As I observed different meetings I took detailed notes of specific actions, statements, and interactions. Erickson (1986, p. 121) describes several questions that can be answered through careful field observation:

- What is happening, specifically, in social action that takes place in this particular setting?
- What do these actions mean to the actors involved in them, at the moment the actions took place?

- How are the happenings organized in patterns of social organization and learned cultural principles for the conduct of everyday life – how, in other words, are people in the immediate setting consistently present to each other as environments for one another's meaningful actions?
- How is what is happening in this setting as a whole related to happenings at other system levels outside and inside the setting?
- How do the ways everyday life in this setting is organized compare with other ways of organizing social life in a wide range of settings in other places and at other times'?

As I took field notes, I also recorded my own reflections and observations in a different section of my field notes. After observations, I reviewed my field notes and (if I took the notes by hand) transferred them to electronic format for easier review and storing. Erickson (1986) describes the task of fieldwork as an effort to become “more and more reflectively aware of the frames of interpretation of those we observe, and of our own culturally learned frames of interpretation we brought with us to the setting,” (p. 140). I tried to be a reflective observer, questioning my assumptions and impressions as I developed a greater understanding of the system actors I observed.

Interviews. I conducted the first set of interviews with five district leaders and staff in spring 2010. I then interviewed, with my research partner, the superintendent and a new assistant superintendent in spring 2011. The superintendent was the only district staff member who was interviewed twice for this study. My research partner conducted the interview of the union

representative. At the school level, we interviewed the principal together and split the counselor interviews. I conducted 10 interviews on my own, co-conducted four interviews, and my research partner conducted five interviews on her own. I drafted the interview protocol for spring 2010 data collection (see Appendix B).

As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) describe it, the interviewer's job is "making words fly." Glesne and Peshkin suggest pilot testing items to assess the flow, content, and structure of interview questions. Consequently, the questions I asked in spring 2010 were used as a starting point for development of the spring 2011 instruments. Using information I learned from that set of interviews, as well as my research questions, I drafted an initial set of protocols for spring 2011 data collection.

However, after teaming up with my research partner, I incorporated questions she wanted, and we revised the protocol together. We used an adapted form of Seidman's (2006) three-part interview series, with the three parts condensed into a single 60 minute interview (see Appendix C). The first part asked questions about the participant's background, including parent's education level and early education experiences. This section provided context to the interview and helped us better understand the participant's perspective. The second part of the interview asked concrete details of participants' experience with the implementation of the mission. Questions included what their role was, what they saw as the primary goals and expected outcomes, and communication about the mission. The third part of the interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning behind the mission and to make intellectual and emotional

connections to promising practices. Questions were designed to maximize a free flow of participants' experiences.

The purpose of interviewing has been defined by Patton (1990) as being "to find out what is on someone's mind....We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe," (p.278). The role of the interviewer, then, is to provide an open and safe space for participants to share their insights and perspectives. To do this, I consciously sought to build rapport with the participants and shared the context and goals of my study. I reassured them of their confidentiality and worked to earn their trust. I approached the interviews as a conversation and remained attentive throughout the interviews. As the interview questions were semi-structured, other questions emerged during the interviews as I probed topics that warranted additional conversation. My research partner did the same. She was also conscious of her role as an interviewer and sought to build trust during interviews. We conducted several interviews together and gave each other feedback as necessary. When we conducted interviews together, we split the questions so that we each conducted about half of the interview.

We used a digital recorder to record each interview and took additional notes by hand or by computer (depending on the reaction of respondents, location of the interviews, and other contextual issues). I am adept at typing and taking notes while maintaining eye contact with respondents, so I took notes during each interview (even when I was the person leading the interview or portion of the interview). I was conscious of showing respondents that I was listening to them

and in the moment of the interview, not jumping ahead to analysis and interpretation.

After the interviews were completed, I sent them to a professional service for transcription to ensure analysis and interpretation could be completed in a timely manner. The transcribed notes were returned as text files and gave word for word accounts of each interview, including emotive notes, such as laughter. Our notes served as back-ups and provided, at times, additional information or context. The recordings also provided useful information, as needed, for further context, tone, and other factors that could not be captured on paper in a transcription. As I received the transcriptions, I read through them and corrected words, such as names of places, acronyms, or jargon.

Focus Groups. My research partner and I conducted focus groups of students to understand the mission's impact on their experiences. Seniors in each of the two focus schools were asked what they knew about the mission, how they heard about information on post-secondary options, and their plans for the future (see Appendix D). To facilitate discussion, I designed an initial draft of the focus group questions to move from general to specific (Krueger & Casey, 2000). My research partner provided input on the content of the questions. I incorporated her input into the final version of the focus group protocol. During student focus groups, she and I split the questions, and I took notes. We consciously worked towards building trust with the students and tried to make the focus groups feel informal to encourage frank discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2000). For example, we opened the focus groups by asking the students about their day and offering

them sandwiches and sodas. We avoided jargon and led the group as an informal discussion. We planned and conducted two student focus groups – one at each focus school.

As teacher perspectives were important to my study, I also conducted focus groups with small group of teachers at each of the focus schools. I asked them about the mission, their perspectives on the mission, and how it affected them (see Appendix E). The focus groups provided insight into the experiences of teachers and complemented the teacher surveys. I conducted one of the groups on my own, and simultaneously took notes. For the other group, I recruited a colleague to take notes while I led the session. To thank teachers for their time, I served snacks at each group. I led the discussion in an informal manner and, at times, allowed the discussion to go in the direction the teachers wanted, ensuring my questions were covered in their discussion. By conducting the group in this manner, the teachers brought forth several issues and concerns that may not have otherwise been noted.

I recorded each focus group using a digital recorder. To ensure a quick turnaround time for analysis, I submitted the focus groups to a professional service for transcription. After receiving text files of the word for word transcription, I reviewed transcripts for accuracy and corrected any issues.

Surveys. In order to gain a wider perspective of the mission's implementation in Ciudad, I surveyed various system actors. The survey included items about what respondents thought the mission meant, how they heard about the mission, effective programs associated with the mission, and to what extent

their district had changed because of the mission. Surveys to district staff, principals, and counselors also included items asking with whom respondents regularly discussed the mission and its related policies (see Appendix F). In order to better understand system actors' perceptions of the mission and its impact on Ciudad, I also included open-ended items.

In constructing the survey, I followed the principles of good survey design such as using simple language and presenting balanced response scales (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2009). I asked two survey experts to review the survey and provide feedback on its design. Though I was not able to pilot test the surveys on the target populations, I asked several of my colleagues, as well as individuals I knew who had worked in Ciudad, to take the survey and provide feedback. I incorporated their feedback into the final versions of the surveys. To ensure a tailored design (Dillman et al., 2009), I customized each survey and recruitment emails for each respondent type (district staff, principals, counselors, and teachers).

In late March, 2011, the district research office sent an email to district staff, principals, and counselors, describing my study and informing potential respondents that the district had reviewed and approved my study. On April 5, 2011, I invited all district leaders, district curriculum staff, principals, and counselors to participate in the electronic survey using the survey software Qualtrics. Each respondent was sent a unique link to the survey which allowed me to track responses and follow up with non-respondents personally. I sent follow up emails to non-respondents with a response deadline of April 29, 2011.

The district research office sent an open, anonymous link generated by Qualtrics to the teacher survey on my behalf on April 25, 2011 to all Ciudad teachers. The district research office sent one follow up email to the entire population of teachers for my survey. The last respondent to the teacher survey was recorded on May 11, 2011.

Survey data provided a more general view of the experiences of various system actors within Ciudad around the mission and its related policies. Through the surveys, I was able to reach a larger group of respondents than I would have through qualitative methods alone. The surveys provided important context and opportunities to triangulate findings. Further, as I was interested in collective and individual understandings of the policy, the surveys provided insight into collective understandings and meanings.

Extant Data. To provide context for my study, I requested several types of extant data from the district. I was most interested in data from 2006-2011 to capture the time before the mission was implemented through the most recent data. I received the following types of data overall and by school in July, 2011:

- College enrollment rates from 2000-2009
- Honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate enrollment from 2000-2011
- ACT scores by subject from 2008-2010
- Dropout rates from 2004-2011
- Four year graduation rates from 1990-2011
- State exam performance from 2005-2011

Though I requested minority enrollment in Advanced Placement classes and overall and minority enrollment in a college-ready curriculum (four years of English, three years of math, three years of science, two years of world language, and one year of fine arts), these data were not readily available. However, the other data helped contextualize my study and provided further understanding of the policy's implementation in Ciudad.

Document Review. There were several types of documents and artifacts that I collected as part of this study. The district created a website devoted to college-going, and I carefully examined that website and its links for how the policy was framed, discussed, and presented. I also collected and reviewed district newsletters from 2008-2011 to understand issues in the district and examine how the mission was framed and discussed. Further, I collected district pamphlets, brochures, and booklets such as a post-graduate planner. These documents helped me understand the language used to describe the mission and its related policies. The district created a “4+4 Plan” for students to plan their four years of high school and then four years after high school. I reviewed the district template of this document and requested and received approximately 20 completed 4+4 Plans for students at each of the focus schools.

In addition, at the school level, I reviewed meeting notes, agendas, and materials related to the initiative. My research partner and I looked through approximately 10 binders of materials at each focus school. We reviewed the materials and made copies of the most important or interesting materials. These materials included notes from meetings of the department chairs and

administration, presentations for staff meetings, and department meeting notes.

These documents helped me understand the messaging around the initiative: who was generating these messages and for what audience they were intended.

Data Management

Given the large amount of data I collected, I had various ways to track and manage the data. Survey data was tracked and stored, initially, in the survey software package Qualtrics. Qualtrics had a comprehensive analysis and reporting system that I initially used to review the data. I exported survey data into the statistical software program (PASW 18, formerly SPSS) and used it to run basic frequencies and descriptives. For the Social Network Analysis data on how respondents heard about the mission and with whom they regularly discussed the mission, I created matrices and managed that data in Excel. SNA data were then imported to the statistical program R for analysis. Data were stored in password-protected electronic folders and systems.

I managed and organized qualitative data in Atlas.Ti. First, I exported open-ended survey responses to text files and added respondent codes (e.g. counselor) and basic information (e.g. how long they had worked in the district) to each response to contextualize the response. Next, I uploaded all open-ended survey responses into Atlas.Ti, along with all interview transcripts. I coded data directly in Atlas.Ti to assess confirming and disconfirming evidence of my assertions. I used document families and code families to manage my qualitative data and conduct efficient queries of the data. Qualitative data was also securely stored in password protected folders and systems.

Documents and other paper-based data were organized in file folders based on affiliation (e.g. district, Plaza, Mercado) and content (e.g. meeting notes, agendas). Data were filed and secured in locked cabinets.

Data Analysis

I used a model for mixed methods analysis described by Mary Lee Smith (1997) as “Mental Model III” where quantitative data was not valued over qualitative data. Rather, in this model, the phenomenon was seen as a complex, contextualized, and socially constructed/mediated by individuals. In this model, it was appropriate to use Erickson’s (1986) modified method of analytic induction.

Materials collected in the field were resources for data. As Erickson (1986) noted, “All these are documentary materials from which data must be constructed through some formal means of analysis,” (p. 149). To perform this Erickson style of analysis, I first organized the data into electronic folders for the district and the two focus schools. Data included:

- Frequencies for closed-ended items and raw text responses from nine open-ended items from 299 teacher, principal, counselor, and district surveys;
- Observation notes from four board meetings, 15 classroom walk-throughs, one district principal leadership committee meeting, and three school-level meetings;
- Interview transcripts from eight district interviews and 11 school-level interviews;
- Transcripts from four school-level focus groups;

- District and school-level documentation including district newsletters and brochures, school meeting agendas and notes, school achievement data; and
- A sample of 4+4 Plans for approximately 20 students from the focus schools.

The compiled data included approximately 1,500 pages of text data, numeric data, and documentation.

After I organized the data into electronic and physical folders, I began my thorough readings of the data in their entirety. I read the district data first since I had started data collection at the district level. This included observation data, interview transcripts, documentation, and survey responses for each of the four surveys conducted across the district. I then read the school-level data from each school which included interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation.

As I read, I noted my reflections and early ideas for assertions. Assertions are “statements of findings derived inductively from a review of field notes and a systematic search for confirming and disconfirming evidence on the assertions” (Smith, 1987, p. 177). I conducted three readings of the corpus of data and then developed my initial set of assertions. This list was exhaustive as any assertion was initially considered, no matter if it overlapped with or contradicted others. I initially had nine assertions.

After drafting my initial assertions, I began by organizing both quantitative and qualitative data to try and warrant each assertion. I used Atlas.Ti

to code data by assertion to facilitate the search for confirming and disconfirming evidence. I also uploaded basic descriptives from the survey results to Atlas.Ti to include in the warranting process. As I coded and organized the data, I weighed the evidence to determine which assertions had the strongest support in multiple methods of data collection. Assertions that were not sufficiently supported by the data were revised or removed. For example, I had an initial assertion about unclear roles related to this initiative. However, after searching for evidence in the data, I determined that the roles were not unclear; though some system actors had concerns about roles in 2010, most roles had actually become quite defined by 2011.

As I generated and tested assertions, I looked for what Erickson (1986) termed “key linkages” among various forms of data to develop patterns of internal generalization (Maxwell, 1941). I designed this study to cast a broad net through multiple respondents, data collection methods, and long-term involvement. There were several opportunities to generate potentially disconfirming evidence that helped me challenge my assumptions. Throughout the process, I revisited my concepts and interpretations to ensure that I gave this phenomenon an opportunity to emerge in various forms.

Though I also examined survey data in its raw form, I also used Social Network Analysis graphs and results to develop and warrant my assertions. SNA is a methodological approach that focuses on the connections between people, groups, or organizations (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The connections, or relationships, impact the spread of information, resources, and ultimately the

functioning of groups. These connections can be represented mathematically, with descriptives such as density, as well as graphically to show the shape of and connections within the network. SNA can reveal patterns in relationships between individuals and measure network structures (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Further, SNA techniques can help identify key individuals or roles in a network, demonstrate underlying structures and organizing principles, and help explain how different organizational work flows impact operations. For a detailed description of the network measures used in this study, see Appendix G.

An underlying premise of SNA is that individuals do not act based solely on their own values and perspectives; rather, behavior is shaped by group norms (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The notion of social networks emerged in the 1960s with Stanley Milgram's small world experiment that proposed that we are all connected within "six degrees of separation" (Milgram, 1967). From this early study, the field of SNA emerged as a methodological approach to understand connections and their impacts on phenomenon of interest.

Social Network Analysis is particularly useful in a study of educational policy within a complex systems framework (Maroulis et al., 2010). Schools and districts, as complex adaptive systems, have various networks which can influence policy implementation. SNA, in particular, provides useful tools to measure these networks.

By providing tools to characterize and quantify relationships between individuals and to investigate how individual actions aggregate into macro-level outcomes, a complex systems approach can help integrate insights from different types of research and better inform educational policy. (Maroulis et al., 2010, p. 39)

To understand the interactions and interconnections between system actors, I asked four survey questions on the district, principal, and counselor surveys. The questions included:

- How did you first learn about the mission?
- Do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies with anyone at the district office on a regular basis?
- [If yes] With which district staff do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies on a regular basis? Select all that apply.
- Do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies with any principals on a regular basis?
- [If yes] With which principals do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies on a regular basis? Select all that apply.
- Do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies with any counselors on a regular basis?
- [If yes] Which school(s) do(es) the counselor(s) work in? Select all that apply.
- [For each selected school] With which counselors do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies on a regular basis? Select all that apply.

I used respondents' answers to these questions to develop network matrices to represent relationships between system actors. I then used the statistical program R to analyze my SNA data. I developed syntax scripts for each network (overall, district only, principals only, counselors only, lead counselors and principals, lead

counselors with principals and district staff, and each studied school). For each network, I generated graphs and network measures. For the overall network, I also generated block models to block individuals into groups by school (with the district as a separate entity). I used these results to develop and warrant my assertions.

In the corpus of data, I looked for specific instances, actions, and events, as well as participant comments, meanings, and reflections to develop and support my assertions. From this careful analysis, I developed a list of well-supported assertions. I then reviewed my conceptual framework and assessed how the assertions demonstrated its concepts such as selection of policy strategies, system actor buy-in and interpretations, and interactions. As I worked through the data, I revised my assertions and ultimately ended up with six warranted assertions.

As I examined the assertions, I continually reflected back to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks to better understand what was happening in this case and how participants were making sense of it. I shared my assertions with a teacher from Plaza that did not participate in this study as a reality check. She felt that the assertions hit on the major issues around the mission, as she saw them. I also shared the general ideas behind my assertions with my research partner for her feedback. She, too, felt that they captured the issues she had also observed. Their feedback helped me gain a more holistic perspective than I could have attained alone.

To provide readers with insight into the assertions, I also developed vignettes that typified the action behind each assertion (Erickson, 1986). These

vignettes were based on actual data or experiences that occurred during data collection. Vignettes present readers with an opportunity to take the journey with the author through an event or a moment that demonstrates an assertion, thereby building credibility and opening data for scrutiny. In Chapter 4, each assertion is stated, followed by a vignette, and presented using quantitative and qualitative data, as necessary, to warrant the assertion.

Researcher Positionality

This study found me more than I found it. In late 2008, a colleague who worked with this school district approached me to attain some data my office collected on first year college student experiences. We presented the data to a university liaison, a former district leader, and the district's research lead. This group then shared the results with an assistant superintendent of the district who then shared it with the superintendent and principals. The district leaders and principals thought the data were helpful, and they wanted to discuss other research activities we could undertake together. As I met with this team, I heard more about the district's efforts to implement a college-going policy. I was intrigued by the policy and its implementation in this urban high school district.

Consequently, I vacillated between insider and outsider perspectives. Though I am an outsider to this district, I developed a relationship with the district over the past several years. This relationship gave me some degree of insider knowledge as district administrators shared their ideas, data, and perspectives with me. This insider/outsider perspective helped me build rapport with

participants and gain access to data that I would not otherwise have. I understood the power of that access and respected the responsibility it also carried.

I was aware of the danger of becoming too much of an insider with the district administrators. I did not want to develop a lens where I filtered experiences and information through the district perspective. This would have limited my ability to understand teacher, counselor, principal, and student perspectives. I did not want school-level participants to feel that I was on the district's side and that they could not share their perspective with me. To avoid this, I made my lack of allegiance to any particular perspective clear from the outset. I valued multiple perspectives and did not hold any one perspective more highly than others.

I was an instrument in this study and that cannot be ignored. My own experiences, beliefs, mannerisms, and ideas influenced this study and my findings. Further, as I conducted some of this research with a research partner, she was also an instrument in this study. She, too, had strong ties to the district and worked with them in a professional capacity for her job at a foundation. She knew several of the principals, both personally and professionally. However, she did not work with (nor did she know personally) the principals involved in our school-level qualitative efforts. She was a proponent of college-going initiatives; and, as a first generation college student, she had deep emotional connections to the idea of college-going for all students. Though I am not a first generation college student, I, too, had strong beliefs about offering all students the

opportunity to go to college and providing them with a strong education to help them achieve that goal, if they so choose.

Given my personal beliefs about the importance of preparing all students for college and the value I place on post-secondary education, I remained aware of how these beliefs could influence what I saw or how I interpreted events or statements. As a former teacher, I also have experience being the target of policy and having to implement policies that I did not fully understand or believe in. While this allowed me to empathize with teachers, it was also a perspective I had to remain aware of throughout the study.

As a researcher whose main experience has been as a contract researcher or evaluator, I remained aware of the differences in this role as a doctoral researcher. As an evaluator or contract researcher it is easier to “hide behind the data” and not acknowledge how you are a tool in the research. It is more difficult, I believe, to examine how you play into a phenomenon or your interpretation of a phenomenon. Your perspective is filtered through very personal lenses of your gender, age, experience, culture, class, sexual orientation, professional standing, and values.

With that in mind, I tried to clearly define my role, purpose, and lack of allegiance to any particular perspective to help participants engage more meaningfully with me and my research partner. It is important to acknowledge that all research has some inherent bias because researchers make deliberate decisions such as what to study, where to conduct research, and which

participants to include (Smith, 1986, 1997). My goal was to be aware of my biases and present as thoughtful of an approach as possible.

Validity and Reliability Considerations

In mixed method designs there are several dimensions to reliability, validity, and generalizability to glean the most meaningful and accurate conclusions. As I was surveying the entire population, I was unable to formally pilot test my surveys. However, several colleagues that were not involved in the study took the surveys and provided feedback. I asked them specific questions about what a question meant to them in order to understand if the items measured what they were intended to measure. Further, I was able to assess the reliability of the survey by reviewing quantitative results in tandem with qualitative results to better understand the accuracy of data from each source. This is a distinctive benefit of mixed methods studies.

In the qualitative portion of my study, reliability took on a more complicated character. I wanted to understand how dependable the collection methods were, how accurately I captured the phenomenon and system actors' understandings of it, and the extent to which I and my research partner implemented the methods with fidelity and consistency. To do this, I carefully documented my methods and sought feedback from my committee, colleagues, and research partner. She and I followed the same semi-structured interview protocols and conducted many of the interviews together. Further, as I reviewed transcripts, I took note of the way each of us framed questions and felt satisfied that we had collected data in a consistent manner.

Validity, or the accuracy of inferences, was another concern. In qualitative research, Maxwell (2005) encourages researchers to examine particular events or processes that could lead to invalid conclusions. Erickson (1986) stresses the importance of searching for this type of disconfirming evidence throughout the study. Given the design of my study, I define validity as how well the inferences cohere, how credible they are, and how consistent they are. I was able to test my assertions through the deliberate process of searching for confirming and disconfirming evidence. In analytic induction, descriptive quantitative data and qualitative data are comparable, and all can be combined in an inference or assertion that then can be warranted. I assessed if the quantitative and qualitative pieces of the study provided evidence that corroborated the other form.

I was able to triangulate the data from surveys, observations, interviews, focus groups, data review, and document review to ensure the accuracy of the conclusions. As Greene (2007) explained, the researcher needs to warrant the quality of their inference, conclusions, and interpretations. In Chapter 4, I tried to provide data and arguments to the readers in a transparent way so that they can see how I developed my inferences, warrants, and conclusions. The readers should be able to judge if the results are justified by the data.

Though this study was not praxis-oriented, per se, the district was interested in the findings as a way to improve the implementation of the mission. This applied use of the findings introduced me to the idea that research provides those studied with information to reflect on, and possibly act, to change practices.

This is known as catalytic validity or “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it,” (Lather, 1986, p.272). Though I was not able to assess catalytic validity before this dissertation was published, I considered it as I developed my assertions. I created a separate, findings based, report for the district and the participating schools. The degree to which the district and schools are able to gain new perspective on this policy’s implementation and use it to change future practices is an important consideration for the ultimate validity of the study.

There are several threats to validity in my study. My own existing preconceptions of the phenomenon, the system actors, and their role in this policy could influence the study. To design and implement the study, I had to have some theories of what I thought I would see and what it could mean; however, I was open to changing those notions and understanding how my preconceptions may have shaped how I viewed and interpreted interactions or discussions. I, with my research partner, discussed our preconceptions and expectations so that we could be conscious of them during the study. Further, I know that our presence in the district had some “reactivity” or influence on those being studied (Maxwell, 1941). Just the fact that we were in the district studying this policy made some system actors who did not know particulars about the mission and its related policies aware of it. Though this happened only a couple of times, I acknowledged the times it did and filtered my inferences through it. Further, during interviews my research partner and I tried to avoid leading questions as they could have had an undue influence on participants’ answers.

There were ways I tried to maximize the credibility and accuracy of my findings (Maxwell, 1941). First, I spent a significant amount of time in the district studying this phenomenon. I became involved in studying this phenomenon in late fall 2008, though I did not begin formal data collection until spring 2010. I stayed involved through the end of spring 2011. This long-term involvement allowed me to test various hypotheses, see how well-supported they were, and if they survived through time. I was able to get a better sense of what was going on and how the situation changed after long periods of time and several interactions.

In addition, I tried to collect rich data that allowed me to present my evidence to my readers in a thorough manner to persuade them of the quality of my inferences. I used verbatim interview and focus group transcripts and detailed observation notes to form my inferences. I diligently examined my data for what Erickson (1986) described as “disconfirming evidence” of my inferences to see how well they could be substantiated. Though I was not able to formally conduct what Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to as member checks – allowing the respondents/participants to view and weigh in on the conclusions and interpretations – before this study was completed, I did vet my interpretations with a teacher in Plaza who did not participate in this study. Further, I provided some initial interpretations towards the end of data collection and asked participants for their feedback. Participants agreed that I identified the salient issues related to this policy implementation.

In addition, the fact that I used more than one school site allowed for comparisons of my inferences in different settings to see which results were similar in different settings and which were the result of particular experiences and factors. Finally, it is important to consider how a targeted audience would judge the validity of my findings. A targeted audience for this study would be district administrators and policy makers who are interested in implementation. This audience would likely judge the validity of my findings in reference to how much time I spent in the field understanding the context, how many different settings I examined, my own description and interpretation of the policy, and the depth of my descriptions. I believe I have presented information that would allow them to sufficiently judge the validity of my findings.

In qualitative studies, and some mixed method studies, generalizability is not often sought after, though some generalizable conclusions can often be drawn. Qualitative researchers are looking to describe this particular context and how the phenomenon exists in that particular time, place, and with those particular participants. As Berliner (2002) noted, “In education, broad theories and ecological generalizations often fail because they cannot incorporate the enormous number or determine the power of the contexts within which human beings find themselves,” (p.19). As contexts vary and ultimately change a phenomenon, what works in one case may not work in another. However, there may be generalities that could help inform similar policies or programs.

In research studies, one can also consider “internal generalization” or the “generalizability of a conclusion *within* the setting or group studied” rather than

external generalizability (Maxwell, 1941, p. 115). I sought to accomplish internal generalization in this study by surveying participants in the same job functions to those I included in qualitative interviews. I surveyed principals and counselors across the district to check my findings and interpretations from my more in-depth examination of particular schools and system actors' experiences with the policy.

In my study, given my mixed method design and research questions, I hoped to produce some results that had a degree of external generalization or application in a different setting. For example, the discussion of factors which lead to varied implementation could have resonance outside of this particular setting. Though the findings are contextualized, I also aspired for naturalistic generalization or the sense in the reader that they recognize and can transfer what is learned in this case to other cases in their experience.

Through a mixed methods design including surveys, focus groups, interviews, data review, and document review, this study presents a comprehensive approach to understand policy implementation in the complex system of an urban high school district. Further, modified inductive analysis and Social Network Analysis techniques provided useful frames to understand who and what influenced implementation of the mission in Ciudad. In Chapter 4, I present and discuss findings from data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA AND FINDINGS

This study examined the enactment of a high school district's mission to prepare all students for college, career, and life. I treated this as a case of policy implementation, using the lens of complexity theory to understand how system actors and contexts influenced variation and adaptation. To gain a broad view of the policy's enactment, I gathered data from a variety of system actors including district staff, principals, counselors, teachers, and students using interviews, focus groups, observations, and surveys. In this chapter, I present findings on the factors that broadly influenced implementation; I characterize variations of mission-related programs at the school level; and I display networks of system actors who discussed the mission and its related policies.

The overarching research question was: how do system actors and contexts influence the implementation of a college-going initiative in an urban high school district? Sub-questions included:

- How can system actors' buy-in, knowledge, and interpretation of the mission goals be characterized?
- What roles do different system actors play in implementation?
- How do the interactions of system actors influence implementation?
- What variations exist in how the mission is implemented at the district and school levels?
- To what extent have system actors and schools adapted mission-related programs and policies to fit their contexts?

To organize my data and findings, I present six assertions in this chapter:

Assertion #1: Buy-in varied across the district. The emphasis on the college aspect of the mission particularly influenced differing levels of buy-in.

Assertion #2: There was confusion about what policies and programs were related to the mission, what the mission really meant, and how to operationalize it.

Assertion #3: There was a conflict between the mission and district practices related to attendance and grading. This conflict created a sense of skepticism about the district's motivations and commitment to the mission.

Assertion #4: Implementation varied at the school sites as schools interpreted the mission to fit their contexts.

Assertion #5: The district's site-based management structure contributed to its uneven implementation of the mission and related policies. Consequently, the district was moving towards assuming a more hierarchical, top-down position to guide mission implementation.

Assertion #6: The district lacked a cohesive measurement system for this initiative; thus, its progress was difficult to gauge. System actors generally believed that the district was moving in the right direction though there were few concrete changes.

Each assertion section opens with a vignette based on collected data that typified the assertion. I then present the qualitative and quantitative data which led me to devise each assertion, including SNA where appropriate.

Assertion #1: Buy-in

Buy-in varied across the district. The emphasis on the college aspect of the mission particularly influenced differing levels of buy-in.

Vignette: One Mission, Three Camps

Every school board meeting I sat at the back of the room with the principals. They saved seats for each other but welcomed me to sit with them. The principals were required to attend school board meetings, and some looked like the requirement was the only thing that brought them there. They sat in groups, leaning over to their colleagues to share an idea or whisper a comment. A few principals usually left after student recognitions at the beginning of the meeting, filing out with the parents and students. Other principals brought iPads and laptops, doing work they were unable to finish at school or simply checking email. Some paid astute attention. A couple of principals I usually sat near would provide me with context during the meetings, explain political tensions, or describe the latest hot button issue. As I attended each meeting, I noticed the principals usually sat with the same colleagues. I wanted to pick out the “three camps” a former district leader described in our interview the year before.

“How did you start to change the culture of the district towards the mission?” I asked this district leader during our interview in spring 2010.

“We started with principal professional learning communities,” she answered. “Part of the conversation began just in creating that sense of dissatisfaction and that dissonance to be able to say, ‘Okay now, look what happens when we have this as an option for students. Let's look at the research.’”

We used a lot of the research from Kati Haycock and Education Trust because the teachers really had that *pobrecito* kind of mentality of ‘these poor kids.’ ‘They don’t have this, and look what their partner district schools are doing,’ and [we] had to kind of bust those myths and start by saying, ‘Take a look at this. Why are they able to do this in the District of Columbia and this school where, frankly, they probably have a worse situation than we do?’ Look at all the support that we have, and really beginning to say, ‘How do we begin to change this?’ [We focused on] getting the buy-in first from the teachers while simultaneously working with the principals.”

“There were, I would say, three [principal] camps. There was the camp of absolutely this is the right thing to do. ‘We have to be preparing our kids for college. It’s racist, it’s criminal, it’s unethical if we don’t.’ The other was, ‘Well, I think it’s a good idea, but I don’t know if they really can. Not all kids really want to go to college, and shouldn’t we be sensitive to that? We’re going to get a lot of flak from our communities, and what if we fail?’ Then there was the camp of, ‘It doesn’t matter if we prepare them for college, they’re not going to be able to go to college anyway,’ because it was at the same time that [a proposition that made non-US citizens pay out-of-state tuition at the state’s universities] had passed. ‘We’re creating a false sense of hope, so why would we do that to our kids?’ Those were the kind of three camps that very quickly developed around that conversation.”

“I wouldn’t say that the camps dissolved, but the two camps that were ‘for’ and were ‘sort of for,’ they kind of merged into more of a ‘for’ camp. It was hard

to argue with this kind of a rationale that economically, socially, morally, ethically, these are important things for us to do. The camp that [was against] — they probably became two very separate camps. What happened is that the camp that didn't think it was appropriate because we're giving our kids a false bill of goods or a false sense of hope, they just learned to become quiet and not to say what they believed. That camp became kind of the quiet dissenters and, frankly, became kind of the saboteurs to the process as we moved forward.”

“It's interesting. I would say we have critical mass with the principals in terms of believing that this is the message that we have to have. I wouldn't say we necessarily have critical mass with the principals believing that we really can achieve this. I think that's a really important differentiation in understanding because while they will state this, it doesn't mean that they believe it. If they don't believe it, they will, in some cases, inadvertently sabotage, but in other cases overtly work to sabotage because they don't believe it.”

I scanned the board meeting room and the clusters of principals, guessing who was in which camp.

Buy-in Varied. The mission was a general statement. In fact, as one respondent noted, it was, intuitively, a high school district's purpose.

If we're having to make a lot of changes because our mission statement is preparing all kids for career, college, and life, then I would be very disappointed because....how could a public high school district not be preparing students for college, career, and life? (Union Representative Interview)

Yet, a district could easily not focus on preparing students for post-secondary success. Many districts focused on getting students through high

school and ensuring they did not drop out. Ciudad made the decision to focus on the outcomes of their students after high school. This was a significant mindset shift for the district. “Our biggest challenge,” noted a teacher, “is changing the culture of adults and students from the goal of graduation to the goal of success post-graduation,” (Teacher SOC). The mission changed the district’s focus and asked students, teachers, counselors, principals, and district staff to shift their focus to post-graduation outcomes. Instead of simply helping students pass courses and progress towards graduation, the mission asked school staff to assume an active role in helping students define and pursue their post-secondary goals.

This shift had not yet fully occurred. The district was “still building a critical mass of faculty and staff who truly believe in our mission,” (District SOC). Opinions about the mission varied. One teacher proclaimed that the mission was “laughable, and teachers and students know it,” (Teacher SOC). While some teachers expressed a similar disbelief in the mission, other teachers were more positive. For example, another teacher noted that it “seems as though most everyone I come into contact with agree and work towards these goals [of the mission],” (Teacher SOC). Clearly, these teachers had different frames of reference and were around people with different perspectives. Buy-in varied across the district.

While many supported the mission, there were, as a district leader termed it, “pockets of resistance.”

There are pockets within different schools, and there are principals who are more capable of leading. There are principals who are managers, and there are principals who are leaders. The principals who are capable of leading are much more effective at minimizing the impact of those

pockets. Now, to be quite honest with you, I don't spend much time with those pockets. I call them the 10 percenters. I don't spend my energy there, the negative wizards, the energy vampires. They're going to exist, and we're going to roll over them. We're just going to continue to....if I can move 90, the 10's going to take care of itself. (District Leader Interview 2010)

As he saw it, principals set the tone for their schools. They could either exacerbate or minimize resistance. Yet, as noted in the vignette, the quiet dissenters, many of whom were in the presumed 90% supporters, were hard to identify and address. Other school staff may have known who some of the dissenters were. "I don't believe that many of our staff and faculty truly believe our students are capable of college level work," a teacher observed (Teacher SOC). If principals or teachers did not believe students were capable, they were not likely to be creating "college-going" cultures in their schools. Further, if the quiet dissenters were hard to identify, their buy-in would be hard to garner. Yet, buy-in to an initiative is crucial to its success. If Ciudad staff did not, fundamentally, believe in the mission, then the culture of the district would not change.

Contributing Factors to Varied Buy-In. There were several factors that could have contributed to the lack of buy-in that I will present in this section. These included perceptions that the mission was shallow, general resistance to change, and the notion that the mission was just another passing reform in a long string of reforms that had come and gone. Yet, the most prevalent reason for system actors' lack of buy-in appeared to be the mission's focus on college-going.

The mission was everywhere. "You'll see it on documents. You'll see it on billboards. You'll see it on posters. You'll hear it on announcements,"

observed a counselor (Counselor Interview). Yet, there was a sense that the mission, with its broad and indeterminate goals, was merely a façade. Some system actors described the mission as a “slogan,” “public relations campaign,” “dog and pony show,” “a phony initiative,” “just a phrase,” “words on a page,” or “a way to make administrators look good.” “The district has always seemed more concerned about appearing to improve rather than really taking steps to improve,” said one teacher (Teacher SOC). Students, also, expressed doubt about the district’s commitment to the mission beyond surface support.

Sometimes I feel like the only reason that we have that mission is just image. Maybe they just have it like the way politicians just say, “Oh, I’m gonna do this and that” just to look good in front of people.... Maybe they just have this mission, [that] they wrote down in order to make themselves sound good so they’ll get the money and stuff. (Student Focus Group)

Most teachers have a poster....where it says....the district core statement, and the mission statement. And most teachers are actually, what’s it called, required to have that. But I mean aside from the posters we don’t really hear much about it. I mean it’s not, but occasionally there’s a, I guess, a pep talk from our principal. Every once in a while he’ll get on the intercom like, “Remember kids we’re....dah, dah, dah....and [school] pride, and we’re a good school, and we’re good kids, we just need better discipline or whatever.” I mean it’s pretty routine. Kinda goes in one ear and out the other. [*Chuckling*] (Student Interview)

If system actors thought the mission was a shallow attempt to make the district look good, it certainly did not engender buy-in.

Ciudad staff also noted that resistance was a limiting factor. “Some teachers, counselors and administrators are reluctant to let go of their old ways and are obstructing the implementation and effectiveness of this mission and related policies,” stated a teacher (Teacher SOC). The mission had (albeit vague) implications for practice. To implement the mission, principals had to focus, not

only on keeping students in school and helping them graduate, but on preparing them for post-secondary options. The increased pressures to produce “college and career ready graduates” required restructuring existing programs or adopting new ones. Counselors shifted from focusing on providing social and emotional support to primarily academic support. For many counselors, this meant learning more about the college enrollment process and more actively engaging with students to plan their post-secondary paths. Teachers felt pressure to increase the rigor in their courses to more purposely prepare students for college and career. So, if system actors did not buy-in to the mission, their motivation to make such changes was likely limited.

Further, many respondents had the sense that the mission, like many other previous initiatives in Ciudad, would not last. “It goes back to the same thing that all the teachers and everybody complain about on the campus that it’s a three-year [cycle], and we’ll live through this, too, and move onto the next,” said a district staff member (District Staff Interview 2010). Indeed, many teachers expressed that the mission was just another new thing. “It seems that every year there is a new program that is supposed to bring all of our students to a better standard,” remarked a teacher. “However, it changes yearly and is not followed through,” (Teacher SOC). If staff thought this was merely a passing initiative, they were not likely to invest in it. District leaders were aware of this issue.

I think the sustainability [of the mission] is based on stability in leadership. I think one thing we’ve learned, too, is if we keep on changing the new program every two or three years, then nothing ever gets done. I’m guarding against that because there are other missionaries out there who want to come save our kids. I think we found a direction and some programs to get us there. (District Leader Interview 2011)

District leaders set a vision and were committed to seeing it through. Instead of quickly abandoning the mission if it did not immediately improve educational outcomes, the superintendent and his cabinet were committed to implementing the associated programs as stable leaders. As the years passed and the superintendent and the mission remained, perhaps staff would become more engaged and invested, knowing that they had stable leadership towards a common vision.

The mission encompassed college, career, and life. However, the district's focus was clearly on college. When asked to describe the mission, the majority of respondents described it as college-going.

The implication of the message, as it has been explained to me, is we must prepare all students to be university-bound upon graduation. The career and life parts are largely ignored. (Counselor SOC)

We have to increase the level and rigor of the education we deliver. We have to get our students ready for college. We have to prepare our students so they have a better opportunity in life. (Teacher SOC)

The way I would tell somebody about our mission would be, like, we are trying to prepare ourselves to be a college student one day. Hopefully get into a university, to be something in life. That's how I would explain the mission. (Student Focus Group)

Yet, the college focus had different implications for different groups. Some groups, especially district staff and principals, saw the college emphasis as a way to provide all students the background to be able to choose college; and this, in turn, would give them the ability to succeed in their chosen path.

The district is focused on adequately preparing students for whatever road they may choose in the future, whether it includes going to college or vocational school or straight into the workforce. We target our efforts on

student achievement and not letting students fall through the cracks.
(District SOC)

It means we give every student the option to choose what they want to do when they finish high school. We often get students their freshman year that think there is no way they can go to college. I believe it is our mission to give them the choice when they get to their senior year. We are opening doors for them; they choose which door to walk through. Of course, not every student will be able to go to college, so we try to prepare them for life after high school. (Teacher SOC)

You know I had to be very, very blunt and say, “You don’t get to choose which of these kids should get ready for college because you don’t know which of these kids are going to college. You have to assume every single one’s going to Harvard, and you need to get them ready for it.” You know that’s all you can do. Otherwise, you’re shirking your responsibility.
(Principal Interview)

Other groups, mainly comprised of teachers, counselors, and students, tended to see the mission as forcing all students to pursue a college path, even if it did not fit their individual goals or needs.

I believe [the mission] should mean that schools are upping the rigor of academics for college-bound students, that schools are doing their best to help students become productive citizens and solid employees for the future work force. Looking at students, their personal interests and skills and helping them develop into content, useful adults. Unfortunately in [Ciudad], it has become forcing all students to take the same curriculum regardless of their ability, desire or future outlook. (Teacher SOC)

Their ideal student is a person who graduates, passes all of their [state exams], goes to the university. That’s what they set you for. They set that as your goal for you. What I would have liked to see more is like a more of a personal touch towards everyone, towards their backgrounds and what they actually want to do instead of trying to convey this image onto them.
(Student Focus Group)

Though most participants agreed that the district focused on the college aspect of the mission, the implications of that focus varied for different system actors. From one perspective, focusing on college in the mission led to activities that raised the rigor for all and provided more equal access to college. From

another perspective, the college focus excluded some students and limited curricular variety.

Further, some respondents expressed concerns that the mission was unrealistic for the Ciudad population.

[The mission] is clearly impossible as we have refugee students who have never attended a school at all in their homeland, we have students who cannot feed themselves, and we have many students who are here illegally and know that any day may be their last here – and on and on – it is a fairy tale assumption. (Teacher SOC)

[The mission is] idealistic and unrealistic. Ignores cultural and social background of student population. Ignores reality that most students are academically ill prepared for the rigors of high school education. (Teacher SOC)

I think many of our students are in survival mode and it's hard for them to focus on going to college. (Counselor SOC)

Counselors and teachers, in particular, were concerned that students were facing insurmountable challenges and would not be able to 1) qualify for college academically 2) afford college or 3) succeed in college.

We have many low-achieving students who do not have the academic skills necessary to be successful in college, nor do they have the drive necessary to develop these skills. Their reading and math skills are far below grade level, so to speak to them about going to college is unrealistic. A high school student who is overwhelmed reading a three-page article or struggles with two-digit multiplication simply does not have ‘the right stuff’ to attend college. (Teacher SOC)

Some Ciudad staff were concerned that the students who did not have “the right stuff” for college were lacking the support they needed to pursue other options. There was particular concern for undocumented students who did not qualify for in-state tuition or federal student aid.

Well, here’s the dilemma again. We have a high percentage of Hispanic students here who are not documented. They don’t know where they’re

going. They don't know how to pay for school after school. They are kind of lost at "Do I do four years and hope things change....and do my best, or do I slide under the radar and just get through?" So that is one conundrum all itself. (Counselor Interview)

If staff did not perceive college as an attainable goal for all, they were not likely to push students towards it. Further, some Ciudad system actors questioned if students were motivated to attend college or were merely apathetic and lacking in drive.

I think there have been some plans implemented to raise our standards, but many students do not want to follow our standards. Many put in little effort to succeed. (Teacher SOC)

It's still pretty apparent as far as like the whole mediocrity thing goes. Everyone's just trying to get out of high school. They don't really care what they're doing after this. They're just kinda like, you know, and just get through this step first, and then figure it out later. I mean, really, I think that's mostly what the mind frame of most of my classmates are anyways. Everyone's kinda just like "I hope I make it through high school, and if I do I'll continue to go on from there." (Student Interview)

Our barriers are student's lack of desire to go to college or even enroll in some further program. Many students lack direction. Also, there is a lack of innate skills that puts a lot of students behind. I think we need to encourage more kids to get jobs in high school to show them the "real" world sooner. I also think we should run our high schools more like college to prepare our students for what they are going to face. I think we get kids into college really well, we just don't provide them with tools to stay in college. (Teacher SOC)

The emphasis on college heightened staff expectations of students, though some questioned if students were ready to (or even wanted to) meet those expectations. The district's enactment of the mission focused on making college an option for all students. However, some Ciudad staff did not believe that college was, or should be, the focus for all students.

Lack of Buy-in Impeded Implementation. The varied levels of buy-in affected the mission's implementation. All system actors had a role in the mission. If district staff, principals, counselors, teachers, or students did not believe the mission was relevant or achievable, they were not likely to actively work towards implementing it.

Well, to prepare every student [for college, career, and life] we all have to be on the same mission, and we all have to want the same thing. In order for that to happen you have to have all the teachers participate. You have to have all the staff have that same thought process. If that doesn't happen and you have a group of teachers that say this isn't going to work, well, you have students in that classroom. Their attitude about the mission will carryover to those students, so in order for the school to prepare every student, we all have to live that mission. (Counselor Interview)

And that we can say [the mission] all we want, but unless we're actually living it, doing it, and breathing it, that those are just words on a piece of a paper or a poster. And so, fundamentally, we have to believe that all kids are able to go to college. But if we don't believe that then, wow, we have some challenges. (District Leader Interview 2011)

As several Ciudad system actors expressed disbelief that all kids could go to college, the district was, indeed, facing challenges. As these participants noted, beliefs drive actions. Individual interpretations of the mission and its perceived appropriateness for Ciudad students could either perpetuate or mitigate the district's move towards a college-going culture. The dissenters, the believers, and the skeptics all influenced the implementation of the mission. Though participants largely agreed that the mission meant the district was trying to become a college-going district, they did not agree on how that focus affected students and to what extent the district should be a college-going district.

Assertion #2: Mission-Related Elements

There was confusion about which policies and programs were related to the mission, what the mission really meant, and how to operationalize it.

Vignette: The Mission and Its Many Programs

“You give that message of college-going to students in everything you do,” the principal remarked. This was my first meeting with the principal to ask permission to conduct research in her school. We were seated at a large meeting table in her office, drinking tea as the second period bell rang. “Tell me what this mission looks like at your school,” I prompted.

“There is so much,” she answered. “We added six more AP classes this year; we use Assessment for Learning to set learning targets; we have the Parent Academic Success Academy (pseudonym) to educate parents about how to support their children’s academic success; we have Advisory to support students academically and socially....I could go on and on.” I frantically took notes, thinking about what I needed to add to my survey as a related policy or program.

“All freshmen visit local universities and take the Explorer by ACT. We aligned our goals with ACT a few years ago and began testing freshmen and sophomores three years ago. Then the district began testing all juniors with the ACT, so we are doing that, too, now. Next year we will also start offering Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a college preparatory skills program, and all freshmen and sophomores will participate,” she continued. “And we offer Cornell note-taking, Socratic Seminar, and I want to bring in more

Problem Based Learning. We started doing these things years ago. I read about college readiness and wanted our school to reflect best practices,” she concluded.

“It seems like you have a lot of different initiatives,” I observed. “Yes, we have too many,” she noted. “Pretty much any program fits within this mission, so we have had to prioritize.” The list of related policies and programs I wanted to include in my survey doubled during that conversation. But, I was not clear on which ones were started because of the mission or were even directly related to the mission. Was the mission literally in everything schools and the district did to the point that it was indistinguishable from other initiatives or embedded into all practices?

Mission Elements: Related Policies and Programs. The mission was vague. Preparing students for success in college, career, and life could encompass many different activities, policies, and programs. “Virtually all positive school activities fit within the mission,” observed a teacher (Teacher SOC). Yet, as noted in Chapter 1, the mission’s related policies included only two explicit changes:

- Required individualized 4 + 4 Plans developed by students and counselors to plan the courses and extra-curricular activities for the four years of high school and the four years beyond high school.
- Increased graduation requirements, effective 2013, to include more mathematics and laboratory science credits to align with college entrance requirements.

These two explicit changes were only part of mission-related activities in Ciudad. When asked about policies or programs related to the mission, school and district staff listed numerous activities from using particular curricular frameworks such as College for All or ACT Quality Core to taking cap and gown photos of freshmen and sophomores. Other examples included Saturday School, ACT/SAT preparatory courses, college visits, AVID, Parent Academic Success Academy, vocational programs, and dual enrollment with community colleges. Ciudad district staff, principals, counselors, and teachers generated an extensive list. However, as one teacher noted, “[A barrier to implementing the mission is] confusion with current practices, best practices, district practices all being muddled together,” (Teacher SOC). If system actors were unsure which specific policies and programs related to the mission, they would have a hard time prioritizing them.

Though not an exhaustive list, in this section I describe some of the specific mission-related policies and programs including increased graduation requirements, 4+4 Plans, district-wide ACT testing, College Source (pseudonym), Parent Academic Success Academy, AVID, increased Advanced Placement classes, and NCEA Core Practice Framework.

Starting with the class of 2013, students were required to take one additional credit of math and science to graduate in order to better align with university entrance requirements. While the universities required two years of a foreign language, Ciudad did not incorporate this into the revised requirements. The increased requirements had an immediate impact on how counselors

registered students for courses. First, students had to take more advanced math their freshman year than they did in the past. This caused an issue for some students who entered high school behind in their math skills and credits. A counselor explained, “It’s the math [that is harder] because they need four years, and if they get off track, it’s hard to get back on. If they start with certain [remedial] classes it’s harder to get up there [to the required courses],” (Counselor Interview).

However, these increased requirements also helped counselors engage in deeper discussions with students about their future plans. A district staff member explained.

So, just getting through the three years of high school math to graduate isn’t enough. If you tell me you are going to go to community college the year after, that’s fine, but let’s broaden the discussion. Where are you going to go after that? If you are going to go to university then we need to get you two years of algebra while you are in high school. It completely changes the conversation of how we register students. It is like all these little light bulbs are going off. (District Staff Interview 2010)

Instead of thinking only about the semester ahead, increased graduation requirements helped counselors frame discussions around a student’s future aspirations. While increased graduation requirements meant students had to fit additional academic credits into their schedule, more students would be closer aligned to college and university entrance requirements.

Similarly, 4+4 Plans helped students intentionally plan their post-graduate aspirations. Students, in consultation with counselors, mapped out their four years of high school and four years after high school to ensure they were taking the right courses to prepare them for their decided path. These plans were largely

viewed as helpful in organizing students' efforts towards their goals. A district staff member explained.

The first time a kid comes to you and says, "Here's my four year plan, this is what I have to do to be able to go to [a state university] and into a pre-med program." And you're going "Whoa," because at that point, you don't have to wake the kid up in the morning; you don't have to convince him to come to school; you don't have to convince him to form a study group to make good grades, to take the right classes, it's there....it's become part of who he is. He knows what his plan is and what the result is going to be out there. I mean, you just think you died and went to heaven. Because all of that, convincing kids that there is a reason to go to high school let alone college, it is already ingrained; it is already ingrained. (District Staff Interview, 2010)

Planning for the future engaged students and helped them work towards a specific goal during their high school years. The 4+4 Plan provided a map towards attaining that goal.

Schools had slight variations in 4+4 Plans in both format and specificity. The district had a template; however, counselors did not often use the district template, and no one from the district required them to do so. At each of the focus schools, the plan format changed each year, based on the student's grade level or changing needs. The basic format included a listing of district and university entrance requirements, a place for students to indicate their post-graduation goal (e.g. attend a university, attend community college, work, enlist in the military), and a section for students to select courses aligned to that goal.

The state department of education enacted a requirement with the class of 2013 that schools had to complete an Education and Career Action Plan (ECAP) for every student that included, at minimum, education goals, career goals, post-secondary education goals, and extracurricular activity goals. The district was

aligning its 4+4 Plans with the state ECAP. The district 4+4 Plans were an essential element of the district's efforts in fulfilling its mission.

Another important element was ACT testing. As a part of mission-related efforts, the district secured funds to allow all juniors to take the ACT without a cost to them. A district leader explained the impact of district-wide ACT testing.

What [district-wide ACT testing has] done is a couple of things. One, it gets all of our kids in the university clearinghouses, scholarships, but also in terms of the cultural shift, it's changed the conversation. The top students are saying, "Gosh, I thought I would do better," and the teachers of the top students are saying, "Boy, Lenay's my top student; I thought she would get better than a 19 or a 20 on the ACT. I need to reflect on the amount of rigor that I am offering in my classes." I think it's another good example of providing people with information so that that will then begin to shift behaviors. (District Leader Interview 2010)

As a part of this cultural shift, some schools had begun using ACT scores to set their school-wide growth goals, rather than the state graduation exam. The ACT, they reasoned, was a more accurate portrayal of students' preparation for college-level work. However, some school staff were concerned that the ACT was too challenging and discouraged students when their performance was sub-par.

Several specialized programs including College Source, Parent Academic Success Academy, and AVID were also associated with the mission, though the district did not run these programs. College Source, a college planning resource center funded by a national nonprofit and administered by the city, provided students with workshops and one-on-one counseling for college preparation. The Parent Academic Success Academy, an initiative of a state university, provided parents of at-risk students with training and information to help them encourage their students to graduate from high school. AVID was a national college-

readiness system designed to increase academic skills and expectations for students who performed at an average level. These initiatives, though not led by the district, were important aspects of Ciudad's efforts to fulfill the mission. Further, these initiatives engaged the community in helping to fulfill the district's mission.

The district also focused on increasing the number of students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. AP was designed to offer college-level courses culminating with an exam. Students who passed the exam were awarded college credit. This could help them reduce the amount of courses, and therefore tuition, they had to take once in college. The district made concerted efforts, as part of the mission, to increase both the number of AP classes they offered and the number of students who enrolled in those courses.

Finally, the district started using the NCEA Core Practice Framework in 2010-2011. The framework was a system-wide approach to improving students' college and career readiness. Developed by ACT and based on practices of high performing schools across the nation, it included a diagnostic rubric for districts organized around five themes. The themes included student learning: expectation and goals; staff selection, leadership and capacity building; instructional tools: programs and strategies; monitoring: compilation, analysis, and use of data; and recognition, intervention, and adjustment. The district rated itself on these themes and identified actions to improve in the identified areas. Schools were also starting to rate themselves to identify their focus areas. The framework was used to set school and district-wide improvement plans.

The district had a variety of programs and policies that could be directly or indirectly linked to the mission. For the purposes of this study, I focused my survey data collection on the elements described earlier in this section. I wanted to understand system actor awareness and perceived impact of these mission-related efforts. In surveys, I asked system actors of their awareness of various mission-related programs and policies. Table 2 provides their reported awareness, by respondent type.

Table 2

System Actor Awareness of Mission Aspects

	Teachers	Counselors	Principals	District
Increased graduation requirements	85%	100%	92%	89%
4+4 Plans	67%	98%	100%	89%
District-wide ACT testing	93%	100%	100%	100%
College Source	37%	90%	100%	89%
Parent Academic Success Academy	53%	95%	100%	100%
AVID	92%	83%	100%	100%
Increased Advanced Placement classes	70%	85%	92%	89%
NCEA Core Practice Framework	16%	12%	67%	56%
Other	12%	12%	33%	44%

As shown in Table 2, system actors, generally, were most aware of increased graduation requirements and AVID and least aware of the NCEA Core Practice Framework. Participants were understandably least aware of the NCEA Core Practice Framework. It had only begun to be implemented in spring 2011, and few schools had used the tool by the time of the survey. Overall, teachers were the least aware of the different mission-related programs and policies.

Respondents were also asked which aspects they considered the most effective. AVID was selected as one of the top three effective aspects across

respondent types, as demonstrated by Table 3. All respondent types, with the exception of principals, selected 4+4 Plans as one of the top three effective programs or policies.

Table 3

System Actor Ratings of Most Effective Aspects

	Teachers	Counselors	Principals	District
Increased graduation requirements	41%	63%	50%	13%
4+4 Plans	38%	71%	70%	75%
District-wide ACT testing	37%	39%	80%	63%
College Source	15%	39%	40%	13%
Parent Academic Success Academy	16%	29%	80%	50%
AVID	66%	61%	90%	63%
Increased Advanced Placement classes	36%	29%	40%	25%
NCEA Core Practice Framework	4%	11%	40%	50%
Other	11%	5%	30%	13%

Interestingly, principals and district staff chose district-wide ACT testing as one of the top three most effective aspects, though counselors and teachers did not. Teachers and counselors, on the other hand, chose increased graduation requirements as one of the most effective aspects, but principals and district staff did not. Finally, principals chose the Parent Academic Success Academy as one of the top three effective programs though no other respondent group did the same. Perhaps system actors believed the most effective aspects were those that they were most active in implementing or were most related to their roles.

Though this list of mission-related programs and policies was not exhaustive, it gave a sense of system actors' perceptions of the various elements. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, respondents identified many "other" aspects related to the mission. Since the mission was a general statement, many district practices

were aligned with it, or perceived to be aligned with it. Further, as one teacher noted about the items in Table 3, “These are good first steps, but they do not necessarily transfer to the classroom,” (Teacher SOC). Many of the programs focused on the school level; few programs focused on changing instruction.

Mission Meaning in Practice. Though district and school staff could identify aligned policies and programs, they were not clear on what the mission meant in practice, or in action.

I feel that [the mission] is just a “buzz phrase” that is often used by administrators. We never talk about what it means, how we can support it, or what it looks like in practice. Instead, it is just a series of words, with no true meaning or value behind them. (Teacher SOC)

We do hear occasional statements from district leaders in which their directive or instructions are couched in the phrase “so students are successful in college, career, and life,” but really analyzing what that mission statement means in helping students transition from being a cooperative freshman student to becoming an independent, inquiring, thoughtful high school graduate ready with work habits and work tools for college, is a task I think we at district and at the school still yet have to tackle. (Teacher SOC)

There was concern, from teachers in particular, that the mission and its related policies and programs did not affect teaching and learning to the extent it should.

“I’m not really sure what the mission means in practice,” said one teacher. “I assume it means preparing students for their future, but I have never received any concrete information about how that should change my teaching,” (Teacher SOC).

Because system actors were concerned the mission was simply a slogan, they were concerned it lacked a true meaning that could transform their district.

When asked to what extent the district’s activities aligned with the goals of the mission, the majority chose “Quite a bit” or “Some.” As demonstrated in

Table 4, the overwhelming majority of principals, 73%, rated goal and activity alignment as “Quite a bit.” District staff were slightly less positive with 67% rating alignment as “Very much” or “Quite a bit.” Counselors were also positive, overall, with 60% rating alignment in the top two response categories. Teachers were the least positive of the groups. The majority of teachers rated alignment as “Some” or lower. In fact, 1% of teachers chose “Not at all” and they were the only group that chose that rating.

Table 4

System Actor Ratings of Goal and Activity Alignment

	Teachers	Counselors	Principals	District
Very much	6%	3%	0%	11%
Quite a bit	25%	57%	73%	56%
Some	53%	38%	27%	33%
Very little	14%	3%	0%	0%
Not at all	1%	0%	0%	0%

Overall, system actors perceived that district activities were related to the mission. Teachers were the least positive, perhaps because they focused on the alignment of classroom activities (which had the loosest connections to specific mission-related programs and policies).

Some respondents had the perception that the district had, as one teacher remarked, “a history of uncoordinated efforts to reach poorly defined goals,” (Teacher SOC). Without specific guidance from the district on how to operationalize the mission, system actors perceived the mission as a distant goal. Despite a plethora of aligned policies and programs, some respondents described efforts as haphazard or not fully thought through.

On the surface, the district activities align with the goals. But the implementation is not effective. At one school where I worked, the decision was made to offer more AP classes. There was no discussion on how to help student[s] be successful in those classes. The principal just decided to offer more classes, without recognizing that the students weren't able to do that level of work yet. (Teacher SOC)

Though district activities had the potential to impact students, some activities were not strategically planned or implemented. The mission was a call to action, but the district did not outline explicit, expected actions for various system actors.

We hear that mission statement repeated over and over, but I don't know that I've ever had any administrator tell me what exactly does that mean. So, we can read it at face value and figure out what it means, but what are we actually doing to implement it? (Teacher Focus Group)

The mission was a general statement, but system actors wanted explicit, actionable guidance. However, as a former district leader observed, operationalizing the mission was a difficult task.

I mean, changing the mission was really the simple thing. The hard thing now is changing what happens every day in the schools, what the roles of the staff become, what people expect from themselves differently, and how well they embrace that work. Those are the tough things, and those are much harder to operationalize. (Former District Leader Interview)

While the district had started to assess all of these elements and the extent to which they aligned with the mission, it would take time for the system to change. In order for things to change, the district needed to provide more explicit information on how to enact the mission.

Because virtually any program could have been linked to the mission to prepare students for college, career, and life, there was confusion about which policies and programs were explicitly related to the mission. Further, the mission

was a general statement and did not provide clear guidance on how the mission could or should change the teaching and learning process – the ultimate level of change.

Assertion #3: Conflicting Practices

There was a conflict between the mission and district practices related to attendance and grading. This conflict created a sense of skepticism about the district's motivations and commitment to the mission.

Vignette: It's All About The Numbers

We were gathered in a small conference room off the main hall after school. Excited voices of students leaving campus filtered into our room. There were nearly 20 of us – teachers, counselors, the professional development coach, assistant principals, the principal, and me – gathered around a very large conference table. At each of our seats the professional development coach placed a packet of 9th grade failure rates from the fall 2010 semester.

“Review the data,” said the principal, “and discuss what you see with a partner.” I was a bit intimidated. I felt as though I should not be there, reviewing this type of data. Though I had visited the school several times before this meeting and had built a good rapport with the staff and leadership, I felt like an interloper.

I thumbed through the pages of tables and charts. Over a third of the freshman class failed at least one course. The subsequent charts broke down failure rates by course name, then by course and absence rate, then by course and period. There were some clear patterns. Algebra had the highest failure rate

compared to English and Physical Science. Nearly a third of the students who failed Algebra had 12 or more absences, though half did not miss a day at all. The last two periods of Algebra had the highest failure rates; conversely, the first three periods of English had the highest rates for that subject. The numbers jumbled in my head. I was not sure if I was seeing what I was supposed to see.

The man next to me leaned over and introduced himself as an assistant principal and asked who I am. “I am a Ph.D. student, and I am doing my dissertation on your district; so I am just here to observe today.” “Oh, a researcher,” he says. “What do you see in this data?” Gulp.

“I see that Algebra has high failure rates,” I mustered to say. “Yes, and notice that it is not just our lower performing students who are failing classes,” he replied. I noticed on the agenda that the main point of this meeting topic was to ensure that special education students were sufficiently supported in inclusion classes.

“I think the absence data is interesting,” I prompted, not sure what to make of that data. “Yes, I hear so many teachers say students are failing because they are not in class,” he said, “but look, nearly half never missed a day.” “Yes, I see that, but I see a bifurcation here. Almost half had no absences but over a third had extreme absences,” I said, secretly hoping the principal would call us all back together soon.

“So, what do you all see?” asked the principal. Silence. Maybe I was not the only one nervous about this data. “I see that most students are only failing one or two classes – thoughts on that?” the principal urged.

“The attendance data is interesting,” answered a teacher. “I would have thought more of the failing students would have a large number of absences, but the data doesn’t seem to support that.” A stilted conversation continued for a few minutes as the group flipped through the pages, especially resting their eyes on the failure rates by course, by period.

“Take this data back to your departments and Professional Learning Communities,” said the principal, “we need to understand what is happening here.”

Conflicting Practices. While the district embraced the vision of preparing all students for college, career, and life, teachers and counselors pointed out several conflicting practices that limited the district’s ability to attain that vision. These practices included lenient application of attendance policies and the pressure to pass students. At the center of these conflicts was the tension between rigor and support.

On one hand, we’re bumping up the rigor, and the other hand, we’re wiping their little noses when they get a sniffle. It’s really kind of contradictory sometimes in the message we’re sending [students].
(Teacher Focus Group)

We’re passing students with 30 and 40 absences. Where is their rigor when a student misses that much of a class? (Teacher Focus Group)

They’re kids. They will do whatever it is that’s expected, but once you start to step back and say, oh, you have 12 absences, oh, that’s so sad. You can have 12 more and still get a B in the class; well, that’s really not the right thing to do. We need to figure out a way to not highlight the student’s issues and more highlight the expectations. (Counselor Interview)

Teachers and counselors felt pressured by administrators to overlook certain behaviors and to keep students in school, sometimes at what they

perceived as almost any cost. However, school staff felt that these behaviors undermined the district's mission to prepare students for college, career, and life. In the real world, students would not be able to miss work repeatedly or fail to turn in assignments without consequences. Teachers and counselors questioned the district's (and administrators') motivations for being lenient on these policies. At best, teachers and counselors thought the administration asked them to provide too much support to students and, conversely, felt staff were receiving too little support from administrators; at worst, staff thought the district was trying to artificially inflate numbers to look good. These practices made school staff wary of the district commitment to the spirit of the mission to improve rigor and outcomes for all students.

Lax Attendance Policies. There was an official district attendance policy. According to the student handbook, students may fail a class after 12 excused or unexcused absences (though some respondents cited 10 absences as the cut-off). Teachers and counselors, however, reported that the district did not enforce the attendance policy.

Any teacher who would actually try and enforce board policy and deny credit to a student with 12 absences, you would most likely be charged with racism and attempted denial of an education of a student. They will go after you. (Teacher Focus Group)

The "they" this teacher referred to was not clear, but the perception was that administrators, students, and parents were on the other side of the attendance issue from teachers and counselors. The extent of the attendance problem was difficult to gauge. Many teachers and counselors brought it up as a barrier to

meeting the goals of the mission; yet, the reported attendance rate in the district was 98%.

The perception was that attendance policies were lax and the extent of the problem was largely ignored. Several respondents mentioned that other nearby districts had stricter policy enforcement.

We should be dealing with student attendance issues. We say that a student may not credit if they have 10 absences in a class but we do not follow that at all. In most schools in [this state] and across the country 10 absences means no credit. Until we work on our attendance rates and getting students to attend school, our district mission will mean nothing. (Counselor SOC)

Without students in school, many staff felt the district could not achieve the mission. They wanted stricter policy enforcement. Yet, if the district had stricter policies, enrollment could decrease.

Do what [a neighboring] school district did and tell all the parents that when your students have 10 absences, excused or not excused, that you're probably not gonna be in school anymore. And adhere to it, and watch the enrollment go down, which we can't do cuz of the economics right now. Watch the enrollment go down that first year as people are dropped and people are scared to death, "Oh my gosh, what if this continues to always be the case?" Then, hope like heck that what happened at [the nearby school district] then happens where it spikes up to the highest level ever when people say, "Oh my gosh, they're actually gonna follow this, and they're gonna adhere to it." (Union Representative Interview)

If enrollment decreased, state funding levels could decrease. Several teachers made this connection and asserted that this was why the district did not enforce attendance policies.

The district has no real concern about student success. They are more concerned that they get their money for each and every student from the state. I say this because there is no real attendance policy with no discipline to support it; there is no tardy policy (we have, on average, up to 2,000 tardies a week!); and when students misbehave or violate classroom/school policies or are disruptive to the educational process the

administration does nothing to support the teachers or curb the student's behavior. (Teacher SOC)

Some funding sources were based on attendance. Every student who attended school for a certain amount of instructional time contributed to enrollment numbers and associated funding. If students missed too much school or were dismissed from school, the district would not receive funding for that student. Because of this connection, some staff thought this was the district's and schools' motivation for lax attendance policy enforcement.

School staff were concerned that lax attendance policies limited students from attaining the best education they could. "You can't learn if you're not in class. Period," said one teacher (Teacher SOC). Some teachers saw student learning and student attendance as directly related. Teachers wanted students to learn and were disturbed that they were being held to account for students who did not attend their classes.

Further, school staff wanted students to know that the attendance policies were serious, and failure to adhere to them led to consequences. "I think we could build our school by....letting the kids know we're serious....If we're gonna say that you need [to] attend, you know there are natural consequences," (Counselor Interview). Without these consequences, school staff felt like they were sending the wrong message to students. "Our words say that education is their key to success," said one teacher, "but our policies do not support what we say. If we can't get kids to show up, how are they going to believe that education is really the key to their success?" (Teacher SOC). School staff felt the district's lack of follow-through on the attendance policy conflicted with the mission to

prepare students for college, career, and life. Teaching kids that they could have a large number of absences without any repercussions was not preparing them for college or careers. In a career, several staff pointed out, you cannot consistently be late or miss work without losing your job.

Pressure to Pass. “Changing a mission statement does not change the overall climate of the district; the policy still remains that we need to pass students regardless of their skill or ability level,” (Teacher SOC). Several staff reported feeling pressure from administrators to pass students. If students were absent too much to earn a passing grade, or failed to turn in assignments, teachers said they were pressured to still pass these students, or offer opportunities for them to make up missed work. Teachers felt administrators sent a clear message to teachers that they should keep their D and F rates low.

Too many administrators and counselors believe in coddling the students to such a degree that the students have no real ambition to do more than they have to. If they aren't pushed, then they won't try. The students firmly believe that if they miss 20-30 days of class in just one semester then they will pass the class because they feel that all the teachers owe it to them. This is a result of teachers being coerced into changing failing grades to passing. We are questioned when we have high D & F rates- administration infers that the teachers are at fault for high student failure rates. (Teacher SOC)

The pressure to pass students was not often an explicit statement by administrators. Instead, some principals would reportedly ask teachers about their high failure rates and what they had done to support those students. Yet, teachers felt they were being pressured to pass students.

Teachers saw the pressure to pass students in direct tension with the goal of increased rigor. “The district has to support the teachers more if we are asked

to challenge the students, not pressure [teachers] more to reduce the rate of D's and F's," (Teacher SOC). Teachers wanted to feel supported by administrators in their efforts to increase rigor and provide students with a challenging curriculum. Instead, some teachers reported being discouraged to assign homework because students would not complete it and would be more likely to fail. Other teachers said they had to provide students multiple opportunities to make up bad grades. Though this may have helped students increase their grades, it also gave them a chance to master material they had not learned. "Well," explained a teacher, "this year part of our [Professional Learning Community] thing was that if a kid failed a test, then you got to let them have a chance to do some sort of recursive to gain the knowledge thing they weren't able to demonstrate," (Teacher Focus Group). Through this type of effort, students could still demonstrate their learning if they missed a test or assignment. However, the teachers in that learning community decided not to allow recursive materials in the subsequent semesters because some students took advantage of that opportunity.

Some teachers saw the relationship between rigor and course passage as either/or: either you have rigor and some students fail, or you have low standards and everyone passes. A teacher aptly described this relationship between rigor and passage rates:

There are some teachers that try to hold kids accountable, teaching to higher standards, but they are not supported in this practice at [the] district. If teachers try to raise standards, some kids will not pass. Then, teachers are made to make sure kids pass, so then they are back to square one, lowering standards so that they will not be penalized. (Teacher SOC)

This either/or relationship between rigor and course passage made some teachers feel like there was not a clear course of action. They wanted to offer students a rigorous curriculum; but, when they did more students would fail; and they were pressured by administrators to pass all students. Consequently, teachers had to offer multiple ways to make up grades. Some teachers described this as a culture of mediocrity because students knew they could redo assignments or turn in late assignments. This attitude, they argued, ran counter to post-secondary and career expectations. “We are only teaching them to ‘get by’ which is not good enough,” said one teacher (Teacher SOC). Other teachers described this culture as reinforcing low expectations for Ciudad students that they cannot achieve at higher levels. This contrast between the district mission and the pressure to pass students made teachers question the district’s priorities.

Well, therein, as far as I’m concerned, lies some of the problems that I see. All of this talk about preparing for college and the world of work. I did see a bit of talking out of both sides of the mouth. They want AP classes and they want higher rigor, but they don’t want very many Fs. (Teacher Focus Group)

Teachers felt that administrators, the “they” in this quote, were sending unclear messages. Should teachers prioritize increased rigor to help achieve the mission, or should they ensure high passage rates? Further, teachers saw practices that helped students avoid failure, such as dropping classes late in the semester, as teaching students that they could avoid responsibility for their academic performance.

Many teachers felt that the responsibility for student academic performance was placed solely on teachers. In fact, school staff reported that

teachers were sometimes singled out for high D/F rates. Some were reportedly brought into the principal's office to discuss their grades. Some administrators reportedly shared failure rates of particular teachers at staff meetings. Teachers with high passage rates were reportedly rewarded.

Teachers at most, if not all, of our schools are still being pressured to award credit that has not been earned. Teachers who maintain even a modicum of rigor are called in to explain their high D and F rates, while teachers who pass students with A's, Bs, or C's even though those grades have not been earned are complimented on their success (however false this success may be in reality). In mathematics, the curriculum has been steadily dumbed down over my tenure in the district, which is contrary to preparing students for success in college, career, and life. (Teacher SOC)

Sometimes low failure rates could indicate that a teacher was teaching the material well; other times high passage rates could indicate lower expectations.

However, teachers were concerned that administrators were not trying to understand the story behind passage rates. One teacher said, "Our district cares more about the number of students failing a course than they care about why students are failing and how to remedy the situation," (Teacher SOC). Many teachers were concerned administrators and the district were motivated by trying to look good.

There's this business management side of making the marquee look good. Okay, I understand the business management side, but it's like what [another teacher] was saying when you have 30, 40 absences, why are we keeping this [kid] on the roster? Why are we-and if a kid doesn't pass, why do we even have Ds? I haven't given-my cutoff is a C. If you get a 69.9, you're taking another trip around, because what's a D? A D does nothing for you. I tell my kids it's just we're too lazy to fail you, you know. You pass, and so you increase the rigor, and you have to jump that. Well, the attitude is well, we're going to - we need to pass these guys. (Teacher Focus Group)

This conflict contributed to a sense of skepticism about the mission and the

district's commitment to it. If teachers were to prepare students for college, career, and life, many felt they should be assigning students the grades they earned and applying attendance policies consistently. Instead, some teachers felt pressured to lower standards because of the district's quest for good numbers.

Practices related to attendance and grading competed with the spirit of the mission to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life. If students were not held to account for their attendance or earned grades, many teachers felt that students were being sent the wrong message. In fact, many considered the message to be at odds with the mission. If teachers felt that the district was pushing these practices in order to look good, not to increase student learning, it could have limited their buy-in to the mission as they questioned the district's motivations. Conflicting practices and competing interests affected the extent to which the mission was implemented in Ciudad.

Assertion #4: Varied Implementation

Implementation varied at the school sites as schools interpreted the mission to fit their contexts.

Vignette: Personalized Form Letters?

"Excuse me, Ms. Gonzales?" a student asked as he popped his head into the Plaza counselor's office during our interview. "Hi, I'm Aaron Rodriguez. I used to be assigned to Ms. Smith, but I think I am assigned to you now."

"Oh, ok," said Ms. Gonzales. "Pardon me, Lenay, I need to talk with him briefly." "No problem," I answered.

“I know it is late in the year, but my plans for next fall fell through,” Aaron explained. “I want to go to culinary school now. The one I really want to go to need letters of recommendation. Could you write one for me? I know you don’t know me, but I really want this. You can look at my transcripts. I have been a pretty good student, my grades are pretty good. I don’t have any training in culinary arts, but I really love to cook. I really want this!”

“Aaron, ok, let me see what I can do. I will be back in touch in a week or so,” Ms. Gonzales replied.

“Ok, um, Miss, the application is due this weekend. Is there any way you can write the letter for me tomorrow?”

“I will see what I can do, Aaron. Come back tomorrow,” Ms. Gonzales answered, sounding a bit defeated. Aaron walked out looking a bit defeated, too.

“That happens all the time,” Ms. Gonzales said as she turned to me. “After all the changes in counselor assignments this year at Plaza, I have so many students I don’t know. When something like this happens, I wish they would have a personal statement or something so I knew more about them. That would make the letter writing so much easier. I guess I will have to pull his record and try to talk to Ms. Smith and some of his teachers today. I have a form letter I could use, but some schools really want to know something unique about the student. I will have to find a way to personalize it.”

A few weeks earlier I had been in a Mercado junior English classroom and the scene flashed back to me. “Think about how you want to represent yourself. What makes you unique?” the Mercado teacher asked his students. Students were

busily writing, their heads down and shoulders hunched over in concentration.

“Why should a college or a vocational program accept you?” he continued.

“What do you hope to gain from a program?” Several students finished their drafts, and began sharing essays, and asking each other for feedback. “You will need to turn these in next week. Your counselors will need these to help you think through your plans during senior year,” the teacher explained.

Later, in interviews with Mercado counselors, they explained how helpful it was that English teachers taught personal essays in class. “You learn so much from their essays, things you didn’t know about your students. Some are facing huge challenges, and you wouldn’t know it if you didn’t read their personal statements. These essays have really helped when we have to write recommendation letters. The students always come in at the last minute, of course! If it wasn’t for this partnership with English, I don’t know what we would do if a student asked us to write a letter for them now! It has really changed our entire process, for the better,” the counselor explained.

Uneven Implementation. Implementation of mission-related programs and policies was uneven across the district. “We have made great strides in achieving our district’s new mission,” explained one principal. “However, there is still quite a bit work to do in order to accomplish this consistently across [the district],” (Principal SOC). Schools had varying levels of commitment and capacity to implement the mission; district staff and leaders recognized this as an issue.

Oh, we're not even there. (*Laughter*) There are places, we have pockets of excellence. We have, I would say we've got maybe four schools that

really get it and are moving in that direction. We've got 17 schools or programs, so four is not great. If you ask the schools, I think 13 of them would tell you they definitely have it but I might be a critical judge. (District Leader Interview 2010)

Not only did schools have varying commitment and capacity, each school's unique context influenced the school's choice of which mission-related programs to implement. These variations contributed to the uneven implementation of the mission and its related policies. Further, as noted in Assertion #2, virtually any positive program could be considered mission-related, creating further variations in what schools considered their implementation of Ciudad's mission.

However, variation is an important component of a complex system. Just as much as it can lead to failures, variation can also lead to improvements and innovative localized solutions. Further, variation in policy implementation is inevitable and desirable (McLaughlin, 1987). As schools modified the mission to fit its contexts, system actors were able to select unique programs or structures that they felt, or hoped, were effective. In this section, I will use the two focus schools, Plaza High School and Mercado High School, to compare and contrast the mission's implementation at the school level.

Plaza High Background. As discussed in Chapter 3, Plaza was a large, comprehensive high school with a diverse student population. The school had three partner elementary districts or "feeder" districts. Plaza staff noted that having students from several different districts was a challenge because students entered with different skills and background knowledge. Plaza was in Corrective Action; therefore, the school had to make significant changes to its structure, curricula, or staffing. The principal explained this process.

There were several different models for Corrective Action. One, close the doors, you lock up the school, and that wasn't very appealing. The other model is that you fire 50% of the staff and take away the principal, and that wasn't very appealing to many people. The other option is that you close the doors, and you reopen as a charter school, and that wasn't appealing to anyone here. They like the good things about our district. The other option is that we implement a new curriculum, and then we change the way we do business. When people talk about the old way, I just tell them, I asked everyone, "Did you want to go get your chains and locks and lock this place up or did we want to change?" Did we really want to bring about institutional change? That means that we have to do things differently. We have to look at teaching social studies differently. We have to look at having an Advisory period. We have to do these things differently, or nothing will change. (Principal Interview)

The school leadership and staff chose to change its curricula. "I've used that, being in Corrective Action, as a good tool to bring about those changes," the principal concluded (Principal Interview). To meet external pressures, the school had to change.

Plaza was one of the oldest schools in the district. This school had previously been a higher performing school. "We did a bang-up job a decade ago. In fact, we were the highest rated school in the state. We were the university cut school....slowly the culture of the school started to change," remarked the principal (Principal Interview). In 2009, approximately 48% of Plaza students enrolled in a public college or university in the state, higher than the district rate of 43%. Staff perceived that the school was at a transition point from a decade of decline to a future of promise and improvement.

The principal had been in the district for several decades and had served as principal for four years at the school. He was a likable and caring leader, quick to recognize others and share in decisions. The school had a casual, sometimes disorganized, feeling. Teachers were dressed casually, a fact the principal noted

would have to change as the school began to implement more formal programs. At the meetings I observed, many teachers did not engage actively with the topics and seemed to be there only because they had to be there. Yet, other staff were clearly committed and engaged in working towards the school's goals. The principal worked hard to engage all staff towards school improvement. School staff described the principal as caring and well-meaning; a district-initiated survey showed the staff had faith in his leadership (Plaza High Documentation).

The school also had an openness and warmth. Students, parents, and staff seemed comfortable there. Parents were often waiting near the front office or talking to teachers and counselors in the hallway. You could feel the growing sense of hope and promise of improvement as you walked the grounds. The principal believed in his school and praised the students and staff for their efforts. Students, teachers, and counselors noted that the principal often played the role of cheerleader. Yet, they felt he did not always have a concrete plan or offered enough direct feedback for improvement. Everyone wanted the school to improve; but they were still trying to formulate an organized approach towards that goal.

Plaza High Mission-Related Programs and Policies. At Plaza, mission implementation focused on improving the school's achievement levels and students' preparation for college. The school had various programs and policies related to the mission including a structured university-preparatory curriculum and Advisory.

The curriculum at Plaza, College for All (pseudonym) was a college-preparatory and examination program developed by a university and administered in thousands of schools. Plaza chose to institute College for All for its freshman and sophomore students starting in 2011-2012. The curriculum was based on international standards and was designed to offer a rigorous, challenging course of study.

College for All was a pivotal piece of the school's improvement efforts. It offered students more rigor; because of this, staff saw the curriculum as aligned with the district mission. "I think we're moving in that direction [towards the district's expectations of the mission], and I think College for All is definitely kinda like a double down, or up the ante in that direction." said a counselor (Counselor Interview). The curricula offered structured, concrete goals aimed at improving the rigor of courses, and hopefully, student achievement. Plaza was committed to the College for All model; the school had even purchased K-8 curricular materials for its partner elementary districts.

Plaza was getting a lot of media attention because of its adoption of College for All. In addition to stories in the paper, the new curriculum gained the attention of Plaza parents. "I had a hundred parents show up for our first meeting," said the principal, "which was very transformational. Where before I'd have five or six parents show up to a meeting, I now had a hundred parents," he concluded. The larger school community seemed invested in the decision to become a College for All school. College for All was, in fact, the central focus of the school's efforts towards the mission.

As part of its mission-related efforts, Plaza was also implementing a new Advisory period. Advisory was a program that some schools in the district started to adopt in 2010-2011. Its purpose was to provide support for college and career preparation including study skills, organizational skills, and information about post-secondary options. Ciudad school and district staff associated Advisory with the mission even though, as noted previously, the mission only explicitly mandated increased graduation requirements and adoption of 4+4 Plans.

In 2010-2011, the school offered Advisory one day a week for 45 minutes. During that time, counselors occasionally came into the classroom to talk about college and career options, but teachers covered various topics. A student explained that Advisory is where he got most of his information about options after high school.

Usually, well because we have this new Advisory period....every Wednesday. And we sit in there for about forty minutes. And it's usually an informational class based on like, for seniors it's usually college information or job fairs or something that'll help us to do something further in the future. But really that's usually where we get most of our information from. (Student Focus Group)

Advisory was a main source of information for preparing students for life after high school. Yet, the school wanted to improve the structure of Advisory.

In 2011-2012 Plaza was revamping Advisory to become a class period every day instead of just one time a week. During Advisory teachers would use the Success Highways curriculum. Success Highways was designed to improve students' resiliency skills including stress management, confidence, and motivation. Students would receive a more standardized approach to build their academic skills. Counselors planned on going in to Advisory classes on a regular

basis, as they had limited opportunities to do so in the past, to provide information to students on post-secondary options and scholarship opportunities. When Advisory was one day a week, counselors felt they had limited opportunities to share information in class.

But next year, there won't be a problem, I think there-next year it's gonna be five days a week, and we're part of the strand. I'm hoping that we can advertise scholarships, advertise summer programs, I have a lot of opportunities for summer programs. I wanna be able to advertise in Advisory, but they wouldn't let me this year. (Counselor Interview)

Counselors were hopeful that the additional Advisory time would help them better connect with students.

The main mechanism for student-counselor interactions at Plaza were group information sessions. Consequently, some students had little interaction with counselors. The Plaza student who participated in this study had not heard of a 4+4 Plan, though he did recall some conversations with counselors to plan his options after high school. However, he felt that he had to go and ask counselors for assistance if he needed it.

But as far as like the counselors go is like usually that's a come and ask type of basis. Where like if you go to them and ask them information, they'll tell you. But they don't usually go out and try to make, give it to you. Unless you're some sort of special case where you need that information, I suppose. (Student Focus Group)

From his perspective, only students who had “special” situations were proactively served by counselors. In fact, counselors did not hold individual 4+4 Plan meetings with students; rather, they were held as group meetings. Students had few opportunities to directly interact with counselors. Counselors, too, wanted more interaction opportunities.

I'm hoping some of this would be cleared up with Advisory. I would like to see more direct access with my kids, or more ways to add capacity. Cuz I'm only one, so if I could find ways to present material to classes, or to larger groups. And we have been trying to do that with scholarship meetings, and we do 4+4 Plan meetings like big group meetings, and parent meetings, big. So we try and get more capacity. Because I think the old way of doing counseling is one and one. And it really, with so many kids, I have three hundred and twenty kids approximately. It's just, it's not possible. And we're constantly pulling kids out of class time. And I don't think that's the most productive way to do it. (Counselor Interview)

The counseling structure at Plaza changed several times in the recent past. Before 2010-2011, counselors specialized in particular populations such as refugees, AP and honors students, or special education students. The counselors worked with those particular groups of students and provided them with tailored support and opportunities. However, in 2010-2011 the administration changed the structure and divided students alphabetically.

There was a change because some counselors had all the honors students, some counselors had all the ELL students, and so counselors were not servicing the students. They were just servicing a certain population of the students. Administration kind of felt that we need to clean that up and find a way where parents are able to say, "Oh, I know who my child's counselor is," [and have] some organized fashion of how to assign counselors. My idea was to do grade levels, but their idea was to do alphabet. (Counselor Interview)

Administrators wanted counselors to become generalists; Plaza counselors appeared to have little say in the change. After working with particular students for years, they suddenly had to refer those students to a different counselor.

Instead of, you know, hey let's do our research and make sure that we have it all, our ducks in a row, and it's gonna happen, it's done. I'm not so sure that kind of, been a little more user friendly for the students. Because then they were kind of confused, well, who's my counselor, who do I go to. Not all of them, but a few of them. (Counselor Interview)

Counselors felt like the changes were made in haste and were not in the best interest of students. Though counselors felt the administration did not communicate the change very well, they had become more comfortable with the change as the 2010-2011 school year progressed. Then, because of Advisory, the counseling structure changed again for 2011-2012. Counselors would be assigned to partial grade levels, or strands, with some counselors taking 9th and 11th graders and others taking 10th and 12th graders. They would work with the Advisory teachers and administrators assigned to that strand to coordinate efforts. So, again, counselors would have to get to know an entirely new group of students.

There was a lack of structure around the counseling department's college and career activities. Perhaps because of the earlier "specialized" division of students, counselors desired, but reported a lack of, consistent standards or requirements for different aspects of their jobs. Further, there were few organized, school-wide efforts for college and career information. Individual counselors set up opportunities for small groups of students to visit colleges, but there was not a school-wide effort. However, counselors planned to provide more structured activities in Advisory classes in 2011-2012. The lack of structure and constant changes in the counseling department contributed to the feeling of disorganization in the school.

Plaza High Implementation. Plaza High School had a lot of programs, perhaps too many programs. The principal felt the pressure and was trying to focus the school on a few programs aligned with its School Improvement Plan.

Everybody wants us to do stuff. There are a zillion grants; there are a zillion things that everybody wants us to do, so we have to be very

focused. What is it that we're willing to do? I've told the School Improvement Team exactly that. We're gonna try to narrow our focus next year to really focus on some key pieces of our School Improvement Plan. That's making sure that we continue our implementation of College for All rigorously and with integrity. We've also decided to go from a one-day Advisory period to a five-day Advisory period, so we want to implement that piece with much rigor. Last year we've also implemented an evening school, so we need to continue to develop that. We're gonna gear up. We're doing College for All; we're doing Advisory; we're doing evening school and we're doing our Pathway studies. If it's not directly aligned to those pieces then we just don't need to do it. There's a lot of really great, wonderful things, great studies, great grant opportunities that doesn't exactly align to that. This district has had a problem with becoming stretched too thin. That's been a significant issue, so we need to really make sure that we're with a laser-like focus, a very keen focus on that mission and our goals. (Principal Interview)

The school had chosen its key programs, including College for All and Advisory, and it was trying to ensure other efforts were directly aligned. The school was at a pivotal point. If student achievement continued to decline, the school would face increasing sanctions. Efforts to improve student achievement were crucial to the school's survival. Consequently, the principal and his leadership team chose programs they thought would lead to improvement.

Teachers were supportive of the school's improvement efforts. They felt pressured to improve student achievement and get out of Corrective Action. A teacher explained their efforts.

So this unit is adapting and working very hard. We're doing our part. The teachers and staff are doing our part. No question. There's money being poured in. That pendulum, we're answering the call. There's probably problems, like were mentioned earlier, but I honestly believe that we're doing what we can to survive. (Teacher Focus Group)

Plaza teachers were in survival mode. They knew their school was facing increasing pressures to perform, and many used that pressure as a motivation to

change and improve. However, some teachers were resistant to the changes at Plaza. Their resistance limited buy-in to the school's programs.

This school is very teacher driven, meaning that if admin wants to make a change, the teachers seem to not be as receptive to change. They seem to have a hard time wanting to make those tough changes that need to be made, but they are battled constantly....That's what I see with this campus is that anytime-like [the principal], I know he wants to make change, but I think he gets battled quite a bit, and so it's just difficult. (Counselor Interview)

To combat this, the principal mandated participation in some aspect of the mission and its related policies and programs. He felt that the staff, for the most part, was moving in the direction with the school.

We also have the Advisory. You can either work to improve the evening school....you can work to help institute College for All; you can help work to build the Advisory; as a counselor you can help work to build the Pathways; but you have to do one of those. The other ones haven't. You have to work to do it, too. If you're not willing to focus on those pieces to help improve the school, then you're probably not in a good fit. You probably need to look at a different school because that's what we're doing here. I've been real clear with that. We've had very good turnout for our trainings and meetings. I think, for the most part, when you're talking about our people working to - there's always gonna be the people that are waiting to see whether something's gonna really take hold and then jump on. There's always gonna be a group of people that say, "No, I'm just gonna do my own thing." I think that group is very small. I think the largest group are the people that really want to make this happen, so I'm excited about that. (Principal Interview)

The principal selected programs he thought would help the school improve, and he asked teachers to engage in these efforts. Most did. However, because the school had so many offerings, it may have divided teacher's attention. Some teachers worked on Advisory; others worked on the implementation of College for All; and others worked on a college credit initiative. There appeared to be few opportunities for staff to come together as a large group and discuss how these

different initiatives fit together or how they would all be expected to implement them in the coming school year. The school was invested in a few promising initiatives, however it lacked a standardized, strategic approach to unify those initiatives towards the goal of increased student achievement.

Mercado High Background. Mercado, as described in Chapter 3, was one of the smallest of the comprehensive high schools in Ciudad. It offered various vocational programs and was experiencing some successes with increased graduation rates and decreased dropout rates. Mercado had an interesting reputation. Some thought it was an alternative school for underperforming students while others thought it was a selective school only for the best students.

It's really bizarre actually. You know it's kind of, it's very difficult to define because I've been in principal meetings where one of the principals will say something. And I just kinda like, he'll say, "Well, thank goodness we have schools like [a small alternative school in Ciudad] and [Mercado] to send our kids who aren't successful." (*Chuckling*) And you know I think, "Whoa." And then on the other hand in the same group you'll have somebody say, "Well of course [Mercado's] data is always higher because they get the special, they get all the best students." You know? So within the same group of peers real differences in terms of how we are seen. (Principal Interview)

Well, I think [Mercado] has gone through a big change overall because before [Mercado] was only a vocational school. Then, it changed to a four year high school; and my first year here was, those seniors were the first group that entered as freshmen. I've seen a lot of changes over the years. I think [Mercado] moved from being really an obscure unknown school to being like almost like the superstars of the district when it comes to our test scores and everything and people wanting to be here. (Counselor Interview)

Mercado served a variety of students – those who were interested in culinary or cosmetology careers, as well as students looking to go to selective universities. Consequently, some Ciudad staff in other schools misunderstood the school's

purpose. As Mercado staff saw it, their purpose was to help students be prepared for vocations and college.

Yet, Mercado's college-going rates were lower than the district average of 43%. In 2009, approximately 36% of Mercado students enrolled in a public college or university in the state. As a career-oriented high school, it is possible that students were entering private vocational programs that were not accounted for in that rate. However, Mercado's college-going rates were among the bottom three in the district.

Mercado had a large population of undocumented immigrants. Because the state's universities did not allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, a sizable group of Mercado students had limited post-secondary options. Further, undocumented students could not apply for federal financial aid. Undocumented students, instead, sought out private colleges and universities in hopes of securing scholarships. Given the large number of Mercado High students in that situation, staff and students were concerned about this issue.

Mercado staff also noticed an increase in deportations of Mercado families in recent years. Though interviewed staff shared several stories, one story from the principal was particularly striking.

We just had a kid two days ago. He's 18 years old. He's this far from graduating. And he's going to Mexico. And I don't say going back. He's never been there. He's actually got documentation. But his family [is], his father's being deported. And he won't leave his younger brothers and sisters. So he's going back with them to Mexico. You know and says, "Miss, I'm, we're, gonna go to Chihuahua. I don't even, I've never been there. I don't know, you know, we have one relative there." You know what I mean? Those kind of stories are happening every day. And so as educators we're in this business. We're assaulted by the effects of what's

going on around us [politically]. And it hits you. *[Voice breaks]*
(Principal Interview)

Mercado had a large population of students who were affected by the state's immigration policies; this helped shape the context of the school and its goals.

The principal had been in the district for several decades and had been at Mercado for six years. She was a dynamic leader. She easily engaged a room with her strong voice and direct approach. She commanded respect, but her staff easily gave it to her, perhaps because she offered them a lot of support.

So you have to set the vision. And then you provide all the support, and all the conditions, and all of the resources that you think are necessary to make that a reality.... And make us all realize that we're in this together. That we're a team, we support each other. Because if not, it starts fracturing. And then it's the [career teachers] against the academics. And then it's the English department against the math. And it's, you know, the classified against the certified. You have to build that sort of team cohesiveness. (Principal Interview)

The principal worked hard to build a collaborative, driven team. She was known for her high expectations and for making decisions based on data. Staff expressed deep respect for her; though some felt she pushed them too hard. Her commitment to make Mercado as successful as possible was evident. She expressed a genuine care for the staff and students and told stories about her school's successful students, beaming with pride.

Mercado had a feeling of purpose and focus. Students were there to earn their degrees and receive vocational training. Yet, the school also had a sense of community. Students tended to a small community garden; teachers offered greetings to each other as they walked by; and the culinary students ran a small café where they knew the principal's favorite dish. The buildings on the campus

were rather spread out, giving a sense that the school had a larger population than it did. Many teachers dressed rather formally wearing skirt suits or button down shirts and slacks; jeans and polo shirts were less common here than at Plaza. Teachers and counselors appeared to be engaged and openly, but respectfully, challenged each other and the principal.

I think that the administration here is supportive, and it listens to us. I don't know that everyone would say that, but my personal feeling is yeah, that we get listened to. They may not always agree with what we're saying. They may still decide that this is how we're handling something; but I always feel that I can express my opinion, and there's not going to be any repercussions. (Counselor Interview)

Teachers and counselors felt engaged in discussions about the school's direction. Even if the administrators made the ultimate decisions, staff felt their ideas were considered.

The line of chairs near the front door of the administration office was often filled with students, parents and, even community members. The counseling offices were located adjacent to the front waiting area, near a narrow hallway that led outside to the rest of the campus. Students often walked through the area in between classes. Students appeared comfortable around campus. The school also had a strong sense of support.

I think our school is kind of seen – this is what other people tell me, though – we're kind of like a country club because we have so many opportunities for the students and staff. A lot of people in the other schools see our students want to be here. They are students that are more motivated because they know what they want to do. They see our students as a better class of students, but really that's not the case. I think our students are just like every other student, but we do have a lot of success with our students. I think that's because we really take the time to work with them if they're having problems, and that's at all levels. I mean, every administrator has a group of students. The social worker keeps an eye on the students that really need help. It's just wherever you turn

if...it's hard for a student to fall through the cracks. (Counselor Interview)

Mercado staff were improving student achievement through concentrated efforts and collective commitment. Though there was a sense of community, there was also a sense of transitivity, as students from other schools also attended Mercado for vocational classes a part of the day.

The school felt organized and driven. Mercado seemed to balance its academic and career foci, though the two could have easily been at war with each other without the strong support and leadership of the principal. Mercado High leadership and staff seemed to share a common, cohesive vision. It was the kind of place where you felt like something was really happening, and you wanted to be a part of it.

Mercado High Mission-Related Programs and Policies. Mercado High School's implementation of the mission focused on balancing college and career preparedness. While the school had various mission-related programs, ACT Quality Core, Advisory, and structured college and career experiences for students were at the center of Mercado's efforts.

Mercado High School started using the ACT exam to set its school-wide goals in 2009-2010 instead of the state exam. For example, the school set the goal that 30% of juniors would meet "benchmark" in the ACT English test by 2010-2011. Mercado leadership wanted to gauge students' college-preparedness and felt that the state exam was not sufficient.

The district's goals are still around [the state exam]. And that's a mindset that I think has to change. Because you're not gonna get to a college-going goal if you're still worried about [the state exam], because [the state

exam] is not college readiness. [The state exam] is basic skills. (Principal Interview)

ACT, the principal believed, focused on college-going skills, but the state exam fell short of that. After shifting their focus towards college-going, the principal and school leaders realized they needed to increase classroom rigor in order to achieve those goals. Not only did ACT Quality Core meet the school's needs, it complemented Mercado's other efforts.

I already had the English department looking at alignment [of ACT Quality Core with other school efforts]....That's why I couldn't do College for All as another option because I think my staff would have just gone nuts. You know that's too much. It's too much. You want this, you want this, you want this. (Principal Interview)

ACT Quality Core was an instructional support system that was a part of ACT's College and Career Readiness System and was being implemented at several Ciudad schools. ACT Quality Core was advertised as a program that could be integrated with any existing curriculum. It offered instructional materials, assessments, reports, and professional development. It was designed to increase the rigor of high school courses to better prepare students for college-level curricula.

As part of ACT's College and Career Readiness System, ACT Quality Core complemented its other products such as the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT exams that were used at Mercado High School. EXPLORE was given at 9th grade to test content knowledge and career interests. PLAN was a sophomore level exam that tested content area as a pre-ACT exam to assess college-readiness. Finally, the ACT exam was given at the junior year to all Ciudad students.

Mercado High School used the ACT College and Career Readiness System in an effort to provide aligned rigor and college-preparatory instruction to all students.

Mercado began implementing ACT Quality Core in the 2010-2011 school year. Compared to Plaza, the school appeared to have done less formal training to prepare teachers for the new curriculum. Instead of the large-scale College for All training offered at Plaza, Mercado's instructional cabinet decided to initially focus on training 9th and 10th grade English and math teachers. Yet, Mercado's leadership knew they needed to offer more training on ACT Quality Core. In a listing of 2010-2011 school initiatives from an instructional cabinet meeting, the notes about ACT Quality Core indicated that teachers needed more training and communication about the initiative (Mercado High Documentation).

Indeed, only two counselors, and no teachers, explicitly discussed ACT Quality Core in interviews. One counselor was concerned about the amount of testing the program entailed.

I think we're over testing the kids. So they are doing the PLAN, the EXPLORE....then the ACT, every kid gets tested. They're doing [the state exam], sometimes multiple times if they're not passing, or if they're trying to Exceed they'll do it again....Now we're doing ACT Quality Core, which I don't totally understand. We're adding more AP tests, cuz we have about eight different AP content areas now, so we're starting those next week. So they have all those. So there's a lot of testing. And I sometimes think that's too much. (Counselor Interview)

ACT's college and career readiness system incorporated a large amount of testing. This counselor was not only concerned about the amount of testing, she did not understand the curriculum and why the school was using it. The other counselor who mentioned ACT Quality Core commented that students had trouble adjusting to the rigor of the curriculum.

I'm pretty sure it was [the principal] who really went after having the ACT curriculum this year that we're having. That's been tough for the students because it's a more difficult curriculum than they had previously. It's more demanding, more demanding of their time, and more demanding academically. First semester we had a pretty high D/F rate, but second semester they're getting used to it. They're getting used to - not all, but a lot of them, they're getting used to what's required and the more demanding [curriculum]. (Counselor Interview)

The curriculum was rigorous. Both students and teachers had to adjust to it. As described in Assertion #3, teachers felt pressured to ensure low failure rates, but at Mercado, as students became more familiar with the curriculum their performance appeared to improve. Yet, these two counselor's concerns – the amount of testing and the level of rigor – were the only explicit mentions of ACT Quality Core by Mercado staff.

While ACT Quality Core was only one component of the overall college and career readiness system, given the lack of discussion about it from participants in this study, the curriculum's purpose may not have been clearly communicated to Mercado staff. Alternatively, perhaps teachers did not perceive that the curriculum greatly impacted or changed their day-to-day work, and it was easily integrated into their existing practices. Either way, Mercado's new curriculum initiative had not yet had a transformative impact on teaching and learning.

Advisory was another mission-related initiative that Mercado High was planning for 2011-2012. Unlike Plaza, Mercado did not have any form of Advisory in prior school years. Mercado teachers were not initially bought into the idea. To help influence the rest of the staff, the principal worked closely with her instructional cabinet. She invited them to attend a meeting at Green

Mountain, the school that started Advisory in Ciudad, and she provided the instructional cabinet with data about the students' needs.

One of the other indicators that led us to the Advisory, though, was we surveyed our kids last year....and one of the questions was do you have an adult on this campus who – I don't remember how it phrased, but it was essentially who really sees, who really cares about you, you know, connects to you. And only 64% of our kids said yes. And we were shocked by that. Cuz we thought that we had much better sort of adult-child connections than that. So that's an indicator. And in these times, my gosh, if they don't feel there's somebody on this campus that cares and connects to them with everything else that's going on in their community. We're really not doing our jobs. (Principal Interview)

Several interviewed staff brought up this school survey and this particular result.

Mercado wanted to offer students support and an adult connection; Advisory was an opportunity to offer that. Though not its exclusive focus, Mercado High staff also saw the academic support possibilities of Advisory.

I think their Advisory next year I think is going to be really positive....I think the Advisory [will be] focusing on organization and note taking skills because they don't know how to take notes anymore; I think that will be positive. I know initially there was some resistance to it; but I think that that ties in perfectly with our mission; and it's going to prepare them better to be successful here and in high school and then when they continue on, whatever they do. (Counselor Interview)

This counselor saw the direct connection between Advisory, particularly its academic skills focus, and the mission. Advisory was designed to offer both organizational skills and more individualized social support.

Counselors also planned to use Advisory to present college and career options to students. In previous school years, counselors went into non-core courses to present on university entrance requirements and demonstrate online tools for college and career planning. Not only would Advisory offer more group

counseling opportunities, counselors looked forward to being able to pull students out to talk one-on-one about academic and non-academic issues during this time.

Well, I have almost 300 students. I cannot possibly get to know all of them. I do get to know a lot of them - and very well. And I get to know my top students. I get to know my bottom students. I get to know the needy students. I get to know the students that really need help a lot. But there's a lot of ones that are quiet and just go about their business, and I don't get to know them. And so we're hoping that that [Advisory] piece is gonna help. (Counselor Interview)

Mercado High staff saw Advisory as an opportunity for more meaningful interactions for students. Yet, as one counselor pointed out, they were putting a lot of weight on Advisory to solve issues. She said, "We keep thinking [Advisory] is gonna be a miracle, that it'll solve problems. *[Laughter]* But you know it's gonna help I think," (Counselor Interview). While it may not solve all of the issues staff hoped it would, Advisory was a central mission-related effort to provide students additional academic and social support.

Mercado High also offered structured programs for college and career planning. It was, in fact, the school's focus. "Clearly what defines us is our CTE [Career and Technical Education] program," said one teacher (Teacher Focus Group). The school offered various organized programs to prepare students for both college and career. For example, all freshmen visited a local university campus as a group to be exposed to the environment and to envision themselves there.

The theory behind [college visits] is a student may not have college or university in their mind, and then they go to a campus and they look around and they're like, wow, this could be me. Look what they're doing; they're building robots over there. We try and get them thinking like that from day one. (Counselor Interview)

As part of the mission to become more college-going, Mercado staff wanted to expose students to college. Further, all freshmen also took a Career and Technical Education course to provide insight into different opportunities based on student skills and interests. Teachers, counselors, and students all praised the course for providing basic computer skills, resume writing tips, and information on career options. “It takes some of the burden off the counselors,” noted one counselor (Counselor Interview). Instead of only counselors teaching students these skills, at Mercado several staff engaged in mission-aligned activities.

Most students, as long as they did not have credit deficiencies, took a Career Connections class their sophomore year. Career Connections was a sampling of the different career programs available at Mercado High. Students rotated every 12 weeks between business (e.g. accounting, management), mechanical (e.g. auto, construction), and human services (e.g. early childhood, nursing, cosmetology) programs. However, students and counselors had some issues with the course. A student remarked, “Let's just say it's not even helpful,” (Student Focus Group). It was difficult for students to rotate that frequently, especially into courses that were of no interest to them. “They don’t spend enough time, I think, researching their own interest,” stated a counselor (Counselor Interview). The course was not offering individualized support and career guidance. However, this was only one piece of the career offerings.

Students were mandated, as part of the graduation requirements at Mercado High, to take a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Juniors took at least one Career and Technical Education course, such as business or

cosmetology, which they often referred to as their “voc.” The school offered over 20 different concentrations.

Well, my voc is in the business class where I just generally learn like some basic fundamentals of business. I think what’s that doing for me, it’s actually going to help me, because like my teacher always said that no matter what profession or field you’re going to enter, you always need business. I think that class is actually helping me learn valuable like skills when I’m taking that class....I can definitely see it helping me in the long run. That class prepares you like how to get a job. Basically, it helps you get ready for the real world. (Student Focus Group)

This student saw the direct connection between his vocational program and future success, even though he was going to go to college. The school tried to make connections between CTE and success in both college and career. “I mean, we really put a big emphasis on how the career that they’re going to be studying is going to help them with their academics and help them move forward on a college track,” remarked a teacher (Teacher Focus Group). Mercado staff found a way to integrate college and career efforts.

Mercado’s design facilitated the school’s implementation of the mission. “I think the CTE kind of lends itself to help to implement the mission maybe better than other places,” observed one teacher (Teacher Focus Group). The school already had a strong foundation in career programs. Consequently, its focus was on developing its college preparatory components. Some counselors felt a pressure from the administration to secure a large number of scholarships for their students. There was a scholarship board in the front office, showing how much scholarship funds, collectively, students had secured. “We’ve gotten more in scholarships [this year] than we have any other year. I think we’re at \$1.6 million now, which is really good for a small school,” stated a counselor

(Counselor Interview). In fact, one Mercado High student secured a very prestigious and highly competitive national scholarship worth over \$200,000. The principal also set a school-wide goal to increase the percentage of students who enrolled in a college or university from 36% to 50%.

The counseling department was pivotal to achieving Mercado's college and career readiness goals. Counselors offered structured group sessions, as well as individual support and consultation. Counselors held grade level meetings to provide tailored information to students as they progressed in high school. These sessions, depending on grade level, covered topics such as graduation requirements, university entrance requirements, ACT exams, and the scholarship application process. They also provided one-on-one meetings to develop 4+4 Plans and schedules. In fact, counselors met with incoming freshman, even before they were official students at Mercado High, to start the process. Counselors described the 4+4 Plan as a tool to help them plan their future.

We explain to them, I tell them, you guys are going to hear every year people ask, even the principal, "What's your 4+4 Plan?" It sounds so confusing. I said basically it's just your plan for the future. That's all it is. When someone asks you what is your 4+4 they're just asking you, "What is your plan for the future?" (Counselor Interview)

That approach may have been effective with students. Unlike the student at Plaza, Mercado students remembered filling out 4+4 Plans.

However, not all students felt fully supported by counselors. They wanted more information, earlier in their high school experience, about college and what they should be doing to prepare.

I wanted to – when I first met my counselor, my freshman year, I wanted to find out what I could do, what could I do now, to prepare [for college].

And every time I would try to visit, he would always say that he's busy with working with seniors, because they're gonna leave now. And when I did have a chance to talk to him, it was only, he would only talk to me about my classes and how to graduate. What I would've liked, is like actually having someone walk me through the process and actually understand what I'm gonna go through and how would it feel. (Student Focus Group)

This student wanted more opportunities to talk with his counselor. Other students felt they had opportunities to talk to counselors but were concerned they were receiving the same advice as every other student despite varying goals. Counselor support was important to Mercado students, though students had varied opinions about the quality of that support. Similarly, as described earlier, counselors wanted more opportunities to work one-on-one with students.

Mercado High counselors also worked closely with teachers. For example, counselors noticed that students were struggling with writing strong personal statements for scholarship and university applications. Counselors approached the school's administration and suggested that something needed to be done school-wide. English teachers began to incorporate writing personal statements into their curriculum, and the quality of the statements reportedly improved. Further, by having it embedded in a course, all students completed a personal statement which helped them be more prepared to complete scholarship and college applications. Counselors also worked with seniors to develop a portfolio that included their community service, activities, and letters of recommendation to further aid the scholarship and college application process.

We want them to have a record, so that once they're seniors they have it ready, and they can start right away applying for schools and scholarships. Otherwise, they come to us and they go, "Can you write me a letter for this scholarship?" I say, "Okay, where's your personal statement?" Well,

I haven't written it. I say, "Well, I can't write a letter without that because I can't write a really strong letter." We've been working on that for the past few years. (Counselor Interview)

Mercado counselors worked with both teachers and students in a structured system of support to improve student preparation for various post-secondary options. These structures helped Mercado High School not only achieve a balance between its career and college goals, it helped the school progress towards those goals.

Mercado High Implementation. Though Mercado High had practices related to college and career readiness before the mission, staff felt that the mission gave them more focus. It helped them increase the rigor in classrooms and hold even higher expectations for students and staff.

So, I think it's a positive culture. I think we're always...we're pushed a lot here, and I don't think that's a bad thing; but I do know that people feel stressed out like sometimes we'll, whether it's the counselors or the teachers or whatever, there's a new initiative or a new something and we're like, oh my gosh, how are we going to do that. I'm guilty of that too. How am I going to fit that in? Usually the initiatives and the ideas that come about, I think, are positive. They're good for our students and that's what it's about. (Counselor Interview)

Mercado had a culture of high expectations. Though it was sometimes stressful to live up to those expectations, Mercado staff were focused on the mission. They used common language to describe the initiative and its impact on students.

When asked the meaning of the mission, most staff gave a similar answer: providing students with the tools to be successful in college because that would prepare them for whatever path they chose.

To achieve this vision, the school increased its rigor and expectations. However, one student expressed concerns about how much rigor had actually increased.

I think it's great, the mission, to have about preparing students and such, but sometimes I don't think they follow it. Like how do you explain....like, yes, they want students to like pass or whatever. Sometimes they really don't take the time to. They just let them fall behind. Sometimes it's more about finishing the assignment than understanding it, do you know what I mean? (Student Focus Group)

Instead of focusing on helping students learn, this student felt some teachers simply wanted students to complete assignments. Teachers expressed parallel concerns that students were too coddled and provided too many opportunities to make up work or earn a better grade. The school struggled to balance support with high expectations.

The culture of high expectations also increased the pressure on students and staff. Students said staff told them constantly about how they should prepare for college and career opportunities: go see a university representative who was visiting the campus, take the PSAT, take certain classes, or enroll in AP classes. Students felt overwhelmed, at times, with all they had to do to prepare for college and career. Similarly, teachers and counselors felt that the administration was pressuring them to ensure all students passed their courses, knew of scholarship opportunities, and had an idea of their career interests and options. Yet, this approach also encouraged teachers to “subconsciously” incorporate college and career readiness into their lessons whenever possible.

I've heard, and I've said it, and I've observed [it in] other class[es].
“When you're in college, you're going to need to do this, or when, you, you know, when you're in the field”....I think that we do that really well

on campus. I hear it everywhere I go. It's that beyond. We are constantly drawing the connection to this learning now will be applied here, here, here, and here. I don't necessarily think it's anything that we do consciously. It's something that I think....once again the attitude. It's almost subconscious. (Teacher Focus Group)

The mission was ingrained into some teachers' practices. The school leadership made it clear that preparing students for college and career was an important part of their jobs.

Generally, staff thought that these efforts were working. They saw progress toward their goals.

I would say that we're better preparing our students for the future. We're looking at their individual needs. We're considering their goals, and we're helping educate them and what they need to do to get there. We're having a more rigorous curriculum to better prepare them to be competitive with their peers. We're trying to provide the support they need to be successful in that curriculum because it's a jolt to them. We're trying to give them the confidence that they need, and we're pushing them, and we're going to keep pushing them harder because they can do it. They can go out there. They can go on to school. They can be as successful as anyone else. That's what we want. That's what they want. That's what their families want. They all want to be successful. (Counselor Interview)

Everyone was invested in student success. The school experienced some early successes. More students were meeting performance standards in English and math in the past two years than in previous years. More students were earning scholarships and enrolling in post-secondary education. The principal credited the school-wide embrace of the initiative for this success.

And I do believe that this is something that is not [my] vision. But this is [the school's] vision. And I believe it, and I hope I'm correct that it will always continue. Because they see, you know, nothing breeds success like success. (Principal Interview)

The common vision of the staff helped Mercado High work towards its goals.

However, the principal expressed that the school also had room for improvement to ensure everyone was onboard and meeting goals.

You know when they get to that, “Okay all excuses aside it’s my job to do whatever it takes, and to get them [where they need to be]” and when they get to that point is when huge, huge gains can happen. And we’re not there yet. We are woefully short of that. (Principal Interview)

However, Mercado staff and leadership appeared to be working together towards common goals.

Collaboration was a central tenant of Mercado High. The school had Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that provided support and direction for teachers in common subjects. Though Plaza also had PLCs, Mercado leaders appeared to have more direct supervision of PLCs. As the principal saw it, the instructional cabinet (comprised of department chairs and administrators) set the tone for the work of the PLCs.

Well, [success] really does depend upon having the instructional cabinet continue to be supportive and then monitoring what happens in the PLCs. That everything that we talk about filters down to the PLC level, and that we are seeing real classroom level changes in instruction, curriculum, and assessment. (Principal Interview)

PLCs helped ensure that mission-related practices affected the classroom. Not only were PLCs expected to work together, the instructional cabinet was also tasked with ensuring implementation. Teachers not only worked with each other, they worked closely with counselors. Their co-development of personal statements as an English course assignment is perhaps the best example of this. Counselors expressed a need and English teachers responded. “I think maybe a positive [impact from the mission] is the teamwork, that’s made a difference,” a counselor remarked (Counselor Interview).

The principal believed that collaboration contributed to the school's successes and would lead to more improvement.

And so, and this is how we define ourselves as collaborative, and transparent in our instructional practices. And I think that's why we can do what we have done. And that's why I hope we can get where we wanna go eventually. (Principal Interview)

Mercado High had a unique approach to college and career readiness with structured programs facilitated by collaboration. Though students and staff alike were concerned with meeting the school's high expectations, those expectations also helped propel the school forward towards its goals.

Comparing Plaza and Mercado High Schools. Though both schools were working towards the same mission, the particular school contexts affected the affiliated programs and policies. Plaza was facing declining student achievement and increased sanctions for its performance issues. To meet these issues, school leadership responded by implementing several structured programs. Mercado High, on the other hand, did not have the same student achievement issues. Rather, its main focus was on balancing its career and college goals. Each school's implementation of the mission, therefore, was focused on different aspects.

Yet, both schools faced similar challenges. Plaza and Mercado High staff and leadership described a lack of student academic skills and entering academic levels. Teachers, in particular, felt as though they had a lot of work to do to get students up to grade level and that students were not being held accountable for their learning. This was related to the challenge, which both schools faced, of having multiple feeder districts. Both schools also wanted more parent

involvement and, for the most part, the principals' efforts to increase parent involvement were only somewhat effective. Further, at least one respondent at each school described restrictive union policies as a barrier to improvement because they said teachers, essentially, could not be fired. As expected, each school would have liked more funds to support their efforts.

Though both schools had students who were undocumented immigrants, more Mercado High respondents mentioned the issue of undocumented students as a significant barrier to implementing the mission. Mercado High teachers, students, and counselors expressed a lot of concern about the challenges of getting undocumented students into affordable post-secondary options.

Undoubtedly, staff and students in both schools were working hard. A Plaza counselor explained, "I think everybody works hard. I don't know anyone who doesn't, and I mean that here [at Plaza], as well as, there [at the district]," (Counselor Interview). The difference between the two schools was not for lack of effort. Both schools' staff and leadership believed its mission-related programs would improve student outcomes. However, they chose different programs and approaches. Plaza implemented a large number of structured programs, but seemed to lack the overall organization to make them a cohesive improvement effort. Mercado High tried to balance its college and career goals and offered structured supports and a cohesive vision, but seemed to lack communication on how to integrate the ACT Quality Core into its pre-existing, and promising, efforts.

The schools also had a different feeling. A Plaza counselor who had also worked at Mercado High described this difference.

I think, well, it's hard for me because I'm coming this year for a first year. And I came from another school. I came from [Mercado High]. And I think the culture is a lot different here. I feel like things are getting better at [Plaza], but I feel that we have a long ways to go. I feel that there's a lot that needs to be changed as far as we need more procedures, and I constantly find myself kind of wondering, "Okay what's the protocol? What the procedure?" So I find that a little bit disconcerting at times because of not really knowing kind of how to handle things, and how – not really know how to handle, but how things are handled here. (Counselor Interview)

The lack of structure at Plaza contributed to the feeling that it was a different culture than Mercado High. Yet, both schools faced implementation challenges. Neither school had yet achieved its goals.

On the surface, each school selected similar mission-related programs; however, the programs were actually quite different. Plaza chose a structured curriculum and was providing extensive training to its teachers to implement the curriculum. Mercado High chose a flexible curriculum and provided targeted, yet minimal, training. Advisory focused on structured academic support at Plaza, but at Mercado teachers focused on giving students less structured social and academic support. Counselors at both schools struggled to support their large caseloads, but Plaza counselors focused on group activities and were constantly changing the department's organization; Mercado High counselors tried to give more individual support and had a more stable caseload. Finally, while both schools tried to provide college and career supports, Mercado High had structures in place for all students in both areas while Plaza seemed to provide more general, less organized, support.

The variations in the school's approaches impacted the implementation of the mission. Though both schools were working towards the overall intention of the mission, Plaza focused on improving student achievement while Mercado focused on providing a balanced approach to college and career preparedness. Consequently, the mission looked different in Plaza and Mercado as the schools chose particular programs and approaches to fit their contexts. Though these two schools only represented a small segment of Ciudad schools, these examples helped me understand why district staff described the mission implementation as uneven. Schools adapted the mission and its related policies and programs to meet their needs.

Assertion #5: Site-Based Management

The district's site-based management structure contributed to its uneven implementation of the mission and related policies. Consequently, the district was moving towards assuming a more hierarchical, top-down position to guide mission implementation.

Vignette: Learning Through Implementation

We were gathered in a small meeting room just off the cafeteria in Plaza High School for the monthly Principal Learning Community meeting. A steaming buffet breakfast sat in serving chafes at the back of the room wafting smells of eggs, bacon, and potatoes as district administrators and principals filled their plates and exchanged pleasantries. They gathered in seats facing the front of the room. Poised and ready. From my seat at the back table, I could see nearly everyone but felt the anticipation from everyone.

This meeting was supposed to be a big show down, though I did not know that at the time. The district had taken a stance on Advisory, a period a day devoted to teaching study skills, providing information on post-secondary options, and holding tutoring sessions. One school in the district had adopted with some success. District leaders wanted every school to adopt it.

“Eight campuses will be doing Advisory in 2011-2012 based off the Green Mountain High School model,” a district leader began. Roughly half of the campuses, I quickly noted. You could feel the shift in the room. This was the anticipated conversation. The district leader continued, “Advisory is not an end all, be all, but it is a good start. I know implementation of this initiative has been bumpy so far, but buy-in will happen. Sometimes the best learning happens in implementation.” I repeated the key phrases in my head, “bumpy implementation” and “buy-in will happen.” I had not yet heard of Advisory and was not sure if or how it related to the mission, but it was clearly important and controversial.

“Remember,” he continued, “you create the narrative for your staff.” Teachers, then, were not happy about this. From the feel of the room, many principals were not either. The district leader concluded, “I would like everyone to give a report on your progress with Advisory.”

The principals took turns describing what Advisory would look like in their schools, if they were adopting it at all. As they reported out, it became very clear that Advisory was going to look different at each school site. In some schools it was going to be every day. In other schools it was going to be once a week. In some schools they were going to start it in fall 2011, in others they were

going to start in spring 2012 or later. The words “resistance” “top-down” were threaded throughout their progress reports.

After they completed their site reports, the attention shifted back to the district leader, and he held it for a few moments without talking. “This is not a top-down initiative,” he stated. “But it came off as though it was,” answered a principal. “In fact,” she concluded “it would have been easier on us principals if it was a district initiative.”

Site-based Management. As one principal described it, “Schools operate as small districts rather than one district,” (Principal SOC). One interviewee likened the district’s structure to a McDonald’s franchise where there were common main menu items but localized specialties (District Staff Interview 2010) and another compared the district to a kingdom where each school was a different village (Principal Interview 2011). There was widespread agreement that the district was “site-based” meaning that the district provided an overall structure, but individual schools were permitted to determine many aspects of their functioning including schedules, curricula, and some aspects of budgets and hiring. However, the district had control over certain important aspects including accountability, required instructional minutes, and hiring approaches within the guidelines of union agreements.

Though the district provided some structure and accountability, its staff also tried to provide support. “We have to always be on that tightrope about being the accountability person but at the same time being a resource and support

for everybody,” (District Staff Interview 2010). A former district leader related this structure to a playground fence:

[The former district leader] talk[ed] a lot about, “here’s the fence to the playground. If you play within that you can play however. You’re a site-based district, and you can play within this fence however you need to play within this fence. As soon as you go outside that fence, the accountability and all this other stuff kicks in, and you lose that safety that you had within that playground fence.” She talks a lot about that. That’s how I kind of see us that we support them within the fence to do whatever they need to do per site but at the same time hold them accountable to that. If they go outside of that fence it’s not that we don’t support them, but we try to bring them back into the fence. (District Staff Member Interview 2010)

This constant tension between structure and support led to a sometimes tenuous relationship between the district and schools. Some school staff saw the district as imposing outsiders, constantly peeking over the playground fence. The district tried to combat the “us vs. them” perception. The district leader explained, “The area where I refocus [principals] is that language of ‘the district.’ I say, ‘Well who’s ‘the district?’ Tell me who ‘the district’ is. Is it me? Is it.....So let’s say ‘we’” (District Leader Interview 2011). This was an important framing. The district office and each school were perceived as separate entities, though district staff tried to bridge that divide.

This site-based structure contributed to uneven implementation of the initiative. First, the district’s site-based structure gave (or was perceived to give) a large amount of power to principals, elevating the importance of their leadership capacity towards achieving the mission. Second, this structure led to inconsistent implementation of promising mission-related practices across the district. Finally,

the district held a central position in discussions about the mission, forming a hierarchy that fostered one-way discussions instead of district-wide learning.

Principal Power. The district gave principals “a great deal of leeway about what they do and how they do it,” (District Staff Interview 2010). As a site-based district, principals were given goals and some guidelines but could choose how (and to what extent) they attained those goals. A district leader explained this relationship:

The relationship from the district perspective with the schools is really, it's very, personality driven. There are principals that have a great relationship with a department at the district but not necessarily with every department. A perfect example is one of our schools absolutely refuses to allow anyone from the curriculum division onto their campus. They're allowed to operate as an independent contractor who is not held accountable for their behavior, for their actions, for their words. In fact as we're looking at data, their scores are continuing to drop, their college preparedness is continuing to drop. Yet, there's no intervention. It's because there's a broken relationship between this principal and [the] curriculum [division]. (District Leader Interview 2010)

Principals had latitude to determine what they would do on their campuses and could even, in some cases, decide if they would adhere to district requirements. Consequently, as another district staff member explained, “the relationship [with the district] always depends on the campus and depends on the person,” (District Staff Interview 2010). A former district leader further underscored this customized relationship, “Some schools want central authority and others want to be left alone,” (District Leader Interview 2010). The district appeared to respect each principal’s desired approach. However, district staff members, at times, felt they had little to no authority over the principals. Consequently, schools implemented different programs and enforced different policies.

Principals held power in the district. Principals were perceived as the entity making the decisions about the district's direction, or at the very least, influencing the district's decisions. For example, when dropout prevention specialist positions were cut district-wide in spring 2010, there was widespread concern about why the district chose to cut these positions. A district staff member explained why he thought the cuts were made:

In reality, when you start hearing about really why things were cut....it's because on one schools' campus with a really powerful principal maybe the dropout prevention specialist was not doing a good job. (District Staff Interview 2010)

Whether that was the case for why those cuts were made, the perception that principals could influence district resources affected the nature and amount of oversight district staff provided to schools. Some teachers also shared this perception that principals held undue power in the district. For example, a teacher suggested principals were "driven by personal agendas" which led to "anarchy" and "lack of direction" across the district (Teacher SOC). Principals were allowed the freedom to do what they wanted at their own school, without real oversight. Collectively, this freedom created divergent strategies throughout the district.

This power made the principal's role, and therefore leadership capacity, very important in pursuit of the mission. Principals chose how to frame and implement a policy element. A counselor explained what she described as "misconstruing" the district's intended efforts:

Well, sometimes [the district] make[s] a ruling, but then things could be changed because of site-based management. Then things really get changed around. I think their intent is good. It always is, and I think the

district office, their thinking is for the student, and their thinking is always in line with mine. Then once it gets to the campuses, then because everything's site-based, then you're able to change, principals are able to change things, admin, or whoever's in charge. Then that's where things get different, and then things don't work, and then the intent is....(Counselor Interview)

Principals were able to change policy elements or directives to fit their context.

Some principals were more successful than others in implementing these changes.

However, they did not share effective strategies across the district. A district leader explained this as a competitive mindset that she tried to change when she entered the district:

It's really about providing focus. And so I think initially....it was about building capacity among the school leaders. So that leadership capacity in terms of "We are not an island at our own little school. Each of our successes are inter-related, and I depend on you and you depend on me." And although competition is healthy, when I came the principals, the school leaders, just seemed very shut, they just shut down kind of. Like there was this big barrier between the district, them, each other. The sense of competition, like "I keep all my information very close to me, and if I'm achieving success then good for me, but I'm not gonna share what I do with you because that's your [issue]." (District Leader Interview 2011)

Principals were not sharing strategies; rather, they were operating independently, many of them working to ensure the district would simply leave them alone. As a site-based district, principals were used to operating as independent agents.

Inconsistent Implementation of Policy Elements. While some principals appreciated the site-based management philosophy and the accompanying freedom, complexity theory recognizes that decentralization can be both "promising and problematic" (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000, p. xiv). New variations can emerge, but effective practices may not be adopted system-wide. In fact, a district leader noted that the site-based structure contributed to uneven implementation of the mission and related programs, such as AP and honors

course taking (District Leader Interview 2010). Schools selected the mission-related elements they wanted to implement and decided the extent to which they would implement them. This was frustrating for the district as they tried to support effective programs across the district:

That's been harder, and in fact the leadership – the curriculum leadership team – will say, “I just feel like we just start to get some positive momentum, and we're starting to get to that deeper level second order change, and then things stop.” What happens is, as soon as you start to make some inroads, and you start getting something going, a principal will say, “Well, I don't want that on my campus,” and they're supported in being able to do that which then kind of sends a message that, “Well, if he doesn't have to, should I have to?” It creates that kind of inequity, I suppose. (District Leader Interview, 2010)

Principals were trying to maintain their freedom to adopt programs to fit their contexts, yet the district was invested in creating effective programs district-wide. These constant negotiations between district staff and principals related back to the tension between guidance and support. The district had to maintain a positive relationship with principals, even when principals mitigated the impact of a promising practice by not implementing it at all or implementing it very differently than the district suggested.

The data revealed two striking examples of inconsistent implementation of mission-related programs: AVID and Advisory. As noted in Assertions #2 and #4, these programs were not explicitly a part of the mission, but they were clearly linked to the goals of the mission. Both programs demonstrated promising outcomes; but the programs were inconsistently implemented; and the programs looked different in each school that chose to implement them.

Though the reasons these elements were inconsistently implemented varied, the district's site-based structure exacerbated these inconsistencies, and perhaps even created them. First, the district made these elements' adoption optional, and second the district provided little structure to guide school adaptation.

Many Ciudad schools adopted Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a college-readiness program. AVID appeared to have some positive impacts on student achievement. Approximately 70% of AVID students passed all parts of the state graduation exam on the first try compared to 49% of non-AVID students (District Staff and Leader Interviews 2010). However, the program looked different at each participating school.

AVID had different entrance requirements, different targeted populations, different numbers of offered sections, and different numbers of years students went through the program. At one school AVID was for freshman and sophomores; at another school the program was for juniors and seniors. At one school the program was four years; at another school the program was one year. At one school there were over 10 sections of AVID offered; at another school there were only two sections offered.

These inconsistencies led to the notion that AVID was "highly supported in one school, but not the next," (Teacher SOC). Yet, other issues, such as reduced district funds for the program and staffing rules limiting which teachers could teach the program and how they were paid, also complicated AVID's

implementation. District staff tried to standardize some of these pieces across the district; however, major differences in implementation remained.

The district's lack of a standardized approach also led to confusion around the implementation of the Advisory period. Advisory began at one Ciudad school, Green Mountain, as a daily period for staff to provide support, guidance, and success skills to small groups of students. The school experienced some successes with Advisory, such as improved grades, which piqued interest across the district.

Further, the Green Mountain principal was influential in the Ciudad network. In surveys, respondents were asked with whom they regularly discussed the mission and its related policies. The Green Mountain principal had 11 incoming connections (indegree) and a standardized degree of .10. Though he did not have the highest standardized degree, as demonstrated in Table 5, of the 16 principals in the network, he was one of the highest. As described in Appendix G, those with high degree centrality tend to be the major channels for information and resources, and were thus more influential (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Table 5

Actor Measures: Principal Degree

Principal	Indegree	Standardized Degree
P 01	8	0.07
P 02	5	0.05
P 03	10	0.09
P 04	8	0.07
P 05	11	0.10
P 06	9	0.08
P 07	12	0.11

P 08	11	0.10
P 09	14	0.13
P 10	9	0.08
P 11	10	0.09
P 12	10	0.09
P 13	8	0.07
P 14	7	0.06
P 15	6	0.06
P 16	11	0.10

Therefore, relative to his principal peers, this principal held a central role in the Ciudad mission-related discussion network.

Though this principal may not have been the most influential principal, he had a lot of connections. This principal was young and new to the district. He brought fresh perspectives and had seen Advisory work in his previous school district. When his school experienced some early successes with Advisory, others started to take notice.

In the 2010-2011 school year, other schools had started to adopt Advisory, but it looked different than Green Mountain's model. One school, for instance, had a 14 minute period at the start of the day called "Advisory." However, as one interviewee explained, it may not have adhered to the intent of the Advisory program.

[This school] says they've been doing it because they had some 14 minute meeting before first period started that they called an Advisory period. That's not an Advisory period, as far as I'm concerned. That's like stealing the word "Advisory period" to have a little period of time to try to make sure more students made it to their first period class. (Union Representative Interview 2011)

This weakened version of Advisory was very different than Green Mountain's structured support and was not as likely to have the same outcomes. Other schools adopted mutations of Green Mountain's Advisory such as holding it one

period a week instead of one period a day. Then, in spring 2011 Green Mountain won an award from a local university for its improvements in student achievement. An article about the award mentioned Advisory as a key component. District-wide, staff interest in Advisory was heightened.

The district endorsed Advisory as an effective program to achieve the mission and encouraged other schools to adopt it. However, some teachers were resistant to Advisory as it would require teachers to lose a prep period during the day in order to lead an Advisory group. To help teachers understand the program and its impact, the Green Mountain principal held a meeting for teacher representatives from across the district. Many teachers attended the meeting and went back to their schools invested in the idea of Advisory. Those teachers tried to encourage other teachers to buy-in as well. Many schools voted about whether or not to adopt Advisory. Some adopted it, others did not. Yet, some principals thought Advisory was a mandatory district initiative and told their staff they had to adopt it. One principal explained the misunderstanding in an interview.

We had a miscommunication where the district decided they weren't going to support it as a district initiative after all. Which they thought, and they said, initially they were. Cuz we had, principals had said, "We want this to be a district initiative." And then for reasons that I can only speculate on, they decided to back off on that. And so, then, when the principals told their staff, "This is a district initiative. We're gonna go ahead with it. Everybody's gonna do this." And then [teachers] find out that it wasn't. You know it, as I had said to [the district leader], I lost some ground there that I really shouldn't have. (Principal Interview 2011)

Though Advisory was a promising initiative, it was controversial. Advisory required teachers to lose a prep period and take on additional instructional responsibilities. Principals wanted this to be a district initiative, meaning that the

district would require schools to adopt Advisory as a top-down mandate. If that was the case, principals would have been able to tell their staff they had to adopt Advisory because of the mandate instead of having to build support and garner votes. The principals who told their staff it was a mandate were frustrated when they later learned that other schools were not adopting Advisory. A district leader had a different take on the situation.

They tried hard to sucker us into saying, “This is a top-down initiative.” The minute we would have said that, it would’ve failed so we never did. It makes it easier when it’s top-down but if it were a top-down, it would’ve failed. What we did was, “Oh, it’s a movement...you’re not being forced to do this.” (District Leader Interview 2011)

Though the district was encouraging adoption, it avoided making Advisory mandatory. The district wanted schools to see positive outcomes related to the program and opt-in. As a site-based district, schools were given latitude to determine if, how, and when they would adopt Advisory. A top-down initiative, the district leader reasoned, would not do well in a site-based district.

However, district leaders had clear intentions that all schools would eventually adopt Advisory.

We have some folks who – again, this is a new initiative – and I think those who jumped out in front and said, “We want to do this,” support them, celebrate them, reward them. Those who could have but didn’t – because I have a couple of schools that are doing fairly well as well but just don’t want to be bothered with anything new – then I think in Phase Two, I force it on those schools. (District Leader Interview 2011)

Advisory, then, would become a top-down mandate. At this point, however, the district was not willing to make Advisory a required mission-related program. A district leader further explained that some of the schools that were not adopting Advisory were the schools that “I have other challenges with regard to their

leadership side, their principals,” (District Leader Interview 2011). As he saw it, principal leadership was a key factor in garnering buy-in and effectively implementing this district-endorsed program. Principals wanted the district to lead the adoption of this initiative and declare it a mandate; conversely, the district wanted principals to lead their schools toward voluntary adoption and avoid declaring it a district mandate.

As noted previously in this section, district leaders wanted to foster an environment where principals were identifying and sharing best practices instead of operating as independent agents.

So the first few months I really spent with building leadership capacity around we’re in this together. And we’re inter-dependent. And we should be sharing with one another instead of each of us reinventing the wheel. We have a ton on our plates. We have a ton to do. Instead of each one of us out there scrambling, and trying to find answers and solutions, we should be focusing on research-based proven practices that are working on our campuses. And share that. And learn from one another. So that we can develop a model for the entire district that helps us get kids ready for college, career, and life. And that, I mean that was really my focus, and I’ve really seen growth in the principals in terms of their ability to share, their willingness to share, their preparedness, their participation in meetings. (District Leader Interview 2011)

District leaders wanted schools to adopt and implement effective mission-related practices. Some principals were on board with this notion of consistent, district-wide initiatives; however, it challenged the freedom schools enjoyed in a site-based management structure. A principal described how this site-based structure affected consistency across the district:

But all the data that’s been collected about this district points to the truth that we are really sixteen different districts. Every school operates on their own and has their own bell schedule, has their own sort of focus....And there is a lack of consistency across the district. And so I know that’s an issue that people consider. However, as a principal

[chuckles] it's kinda like, "Sounds good. But don't make me do what everybody else does." *[Chuckles]* You know just like a child. But, I mean, I do worry a little bit about trying to systemize, and centralize, and keep consistent across the district. Because where are you gonna draw that line then? You know? And so I'm not sure how that's all gonna come out. (Principal Interview 2011)

This was the conundrum. Principals wanted the freedom to define the mission's implementation at their school site, but they recognized the inconsistencies this freedom caused. They wanted some amount of district centralization to provide more consistent implementation. However, they did not want so much centralization that they no longer had power to shape their school's programs. These tensions limited Ciudad's ability to implement district-wide initiatives.

District Position. Ciudad district staff tried to balance support and guidance, providing principals with the autonomy to make important decisions. However, the district was moving towards assuming a more hierarchal, top-down position; this position was demonstrated in its approach to mission-related discussions. In this section, I describe the district's role in terms of providing centralized guidance around the mission and its related policies. I use SNA data to demonstrate that district staff had the broadest reach across schools and reported mission-related discussions with the widest range of system actors. Yet, school staff did not often reciprocate these connections, forming a hierarchical communication chain. With a largely directive and one-way communication channel, district staff may have been unaware of effective (or ineffective) school implementation strategies.

In spring 2011 the district was trying to become more centralized to encourage more consistent implementation and support.

[The district is site-based] to an extreme that is detrimental to the movement of the organization. And so now we're pulling, and they want, principals want leadership and some level of centralization. They really do. They've asked for it. Now that can be done in a way that still gives them flexibility, but there has to be a balance. So [these guidelines on school improvement plans] for example they like. You know, [they say] "Give us the structure, the framework for our school improvement plan, and then let us tailor certain components of it. But give us the minimum requirements." (District Leader Interview, 2011).

School staff wanted direction from the district, but they also wanted flexibility.

The district was trying to find a balance between centralization and autonomy. As demonstrated by the Advisory discussion earlier in this section, the district's attempts at centralization were weakly enforced. Though the district (and especially one of the new district leaders) wanted to provide more guidance, the district was still determining how to best do that in a site-based district. A principal described her experience with district support.

At the district level, I think, with the leadership it's kind of like in a family. When you have a kid that does well and doesn't cause a lot of trouble, and you just kind of let them go and just let them do their thing, which is good and bad. You know we're, I think, we're not micro-managed in any sense of the word. But sometimes we have to really ask for more support, or ask for certain kinds of identification of things that we need. And where we shouldn't have to have asked for it. It should have just been [given]. (Principal Interview 2011)

Though principals wanted some control over their schools, many also wanted support and clearer guidelines from the district.

Counselors, in particular, echoed a desire for more district support and guidance. Formerly, counselors had a lead counselor at the district office.

Though she did not mandate particular programs, she gave counselors clear guidelines and expectations and operated as a counselor advocate in the district.

In 2010-2011, the district lead counselor retired and was not replaced. "What an

invaluable resource [the former lead counselor was]....I wouldn't say it has crippled us, but we've certainly been very hurt by not having a counselor [at the district office]," noted a counselor (Counselor Interview). Instead, the district leader provided counselors with information and direction. However, counselors wanted a dedicated advocate at the district who would provide clearer guidelines and more customized support.

We used to have, our department used to have a [district] person over us. And we don't have that person anymore. So we kinda have a [district leader] over us, and we have this person and that person, an articulation specialist or something. Not really people that understand counseling. So for us it's been, for me personally, it's been very frustrating. Because I don't feel like we're heard. Or the meeting that we have, when we do get a communication, it's communication at us. There's, doesn't seem like there's a lot of, oh checking your best, or seeing what we need, or anything. It doesn't seem there's a lot of that. I think the person in charge would do that if I told her I needed something, but it's just different. It's a different air. I mean, other academic departments they have somebody who is a content specialist over them, and they have somebody to go to. We do not. So that's frustrating. (Counselor Interview)

Some counselors felt that they were not listened to or respected by the district. Perhaps as a symptom of increased centralization, the district provided one-way communication. Because the district talked *to* counselors instead of *with* counselors, they were unable to provide counselors the full support they needed.

For example, many counselors wanted check lists of district expectations for 4+4 Plans to ensure they were on the right track. Each school had a different form that aligned, to different degrees, with the state student education plan form. A counselor explained how this made it confusing to know the correct format to use.

Their perception [of what the form should be] may not be what we're thinking, and so if we had that type of form just for counselors to say,

‘Okay, hey, what are you guys doing? This is what we’re thinking,’ and then kind of match it up and take out things we shouldn’t be doing or should do. Then just have one check off sheet just for counselors saying this is what is expected at the district office. (Counselor Interview)

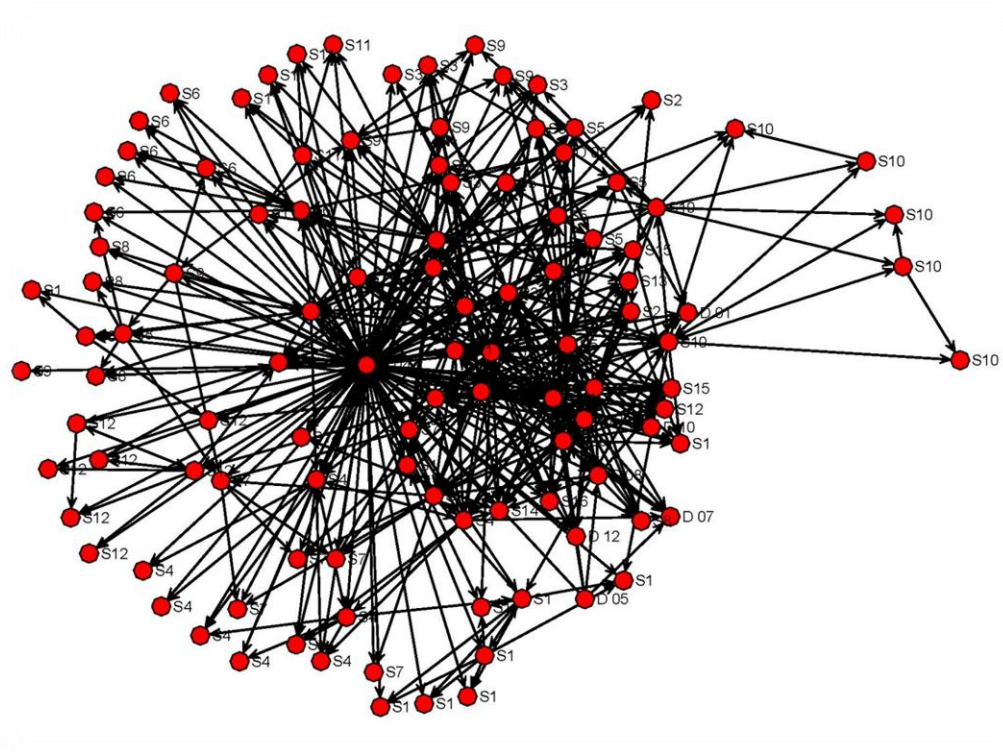
The state was beginning to conduct audits of student education plan forms, and counselors were nervous that they were not adhering to expectations. They wanted clear guidelines for the forms and processes. As a site-based district, each school had different formats for 4+4 Plans. In fact, some schools changed the form annually, so even within one school students had different forms. In order to adhere to the audit requirements, the forms had to be transferred into the state student education plan format. As this was potentially an accountability issue, counselors looked to the district for guidance. Yet, many counselors said they had not yet received that guidance.

While the district was trying to become more directive about what they expected from schools, they were not always gathering information from schools about what kind of support they needed. District staff had not yet found the balance between direction and flexibility. They either provided guidelines without providing explicit direction, or they provided information when school staff needed support. Consequently, some sites progressed, or regressed, as they experimented with mission-related programs and practices.

Ciudad Network Structures. Social Network Analysis also indicated that district staff were directive with school staff while at the same time falling short of responsiveness. In surveys, Ciudad district staff, principals, and counselors were asked with whom they regularly discussed the mission and its related policies. These data were used to form a network of ties about discussions

of the mission (Figure 2). Each point, or node, represented an individual in the network (N=110) and the lines represented ties between actors. All individuals in the network were named by at least one person. So, even if that individual did not respond to the survey, they were represented in the SNA. Each node was labeled with the school they worked in (e.g. S3) or the district (D).

Figure 2. Overall Network Structure



As demonstrated by Figure 2, there were many connections between nodes, though many individuals from the same schools were close together in the network. The mean degree, or average number of connections for each individual, was 5.15. Individual outdegree (the number of other actors an individual nominated as a connection) ranged from 0 to 97. The density of the network, or the percentage of ties that existed out of all possible ties, was 5%.

Though this was a low density, I was not entirely surprised at this number.

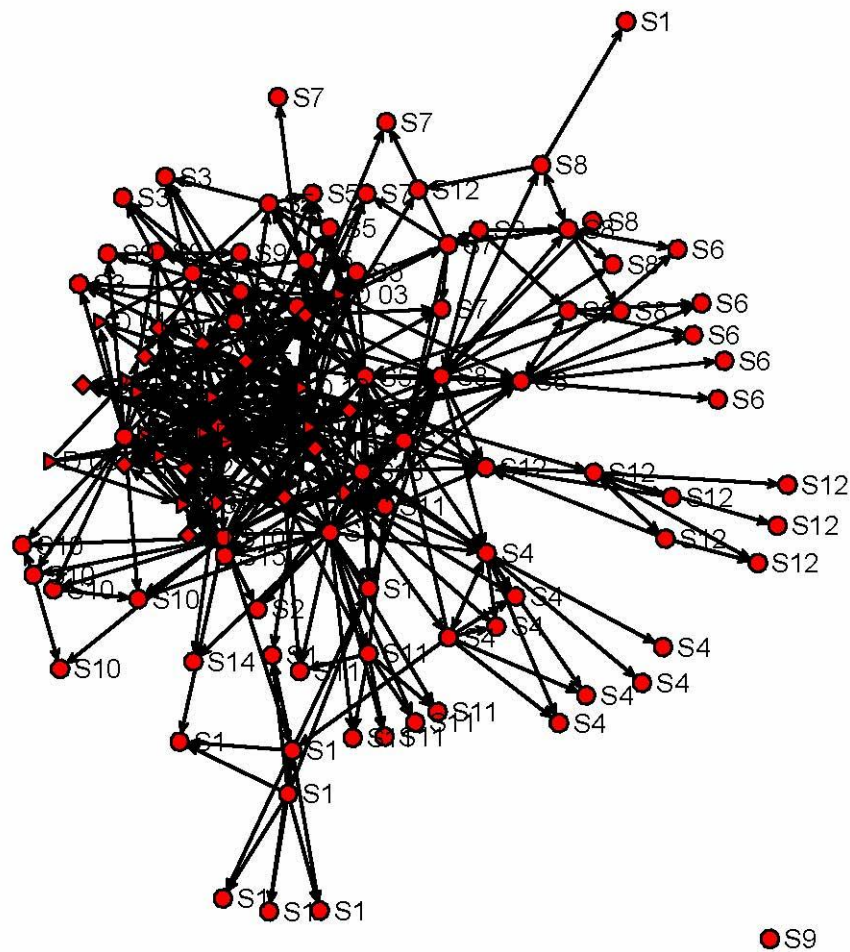
Knowing that schools largely functioned as separate entities in Ciudad, I would not expect there to be a large number of ties between system actors at different schools. Further, the majority of the network was comprised of counselors (N=81). Counselors were the least likely to have connections to actors at other schools given the nature of their jobs and their internal, student-level focus.

One actor, a key district leader, appeared to be quite central in the network graph. Her role was, indeed, central to the mission as she oversaw several aspects of its implementation. To determine how much this district leader dominated the centrality of the network, I examined undirected and directed centralization measures. As discussed in Appendix G, undirected centralization does not take into account the direction of the connection (incoming or outgoing). Directed centralization, however, differentiates between one-way and two-way communication by taking into account the direction of connections. Undirected centralization was 13% in this network. The directed centralization, measured only by outdegree, was 85%. The undirected and directed centralizations were dramatically different in the case of the mission-related discussions. Clearly, there were more one-sided conversations in this network than two-way communications.

The Ciudad network was not a perfectly centralized network, but the center node representing the key district leader greatly contributed to the high directed centralization. She had 97 outgoing ties and 19 incoming ties – the

highest numbers in the network. The network without this central person (Figure 3) appeared less centralized.

Figure 3. Overall Network Structure Without Most Central System Actor



Though there was a cluster of system actors to one side of the network (comprised of mainly district staff and principals), there were more loosely connected individual nodes than in the previous network with the key district leader.

The network measures also changed without this central district leader.

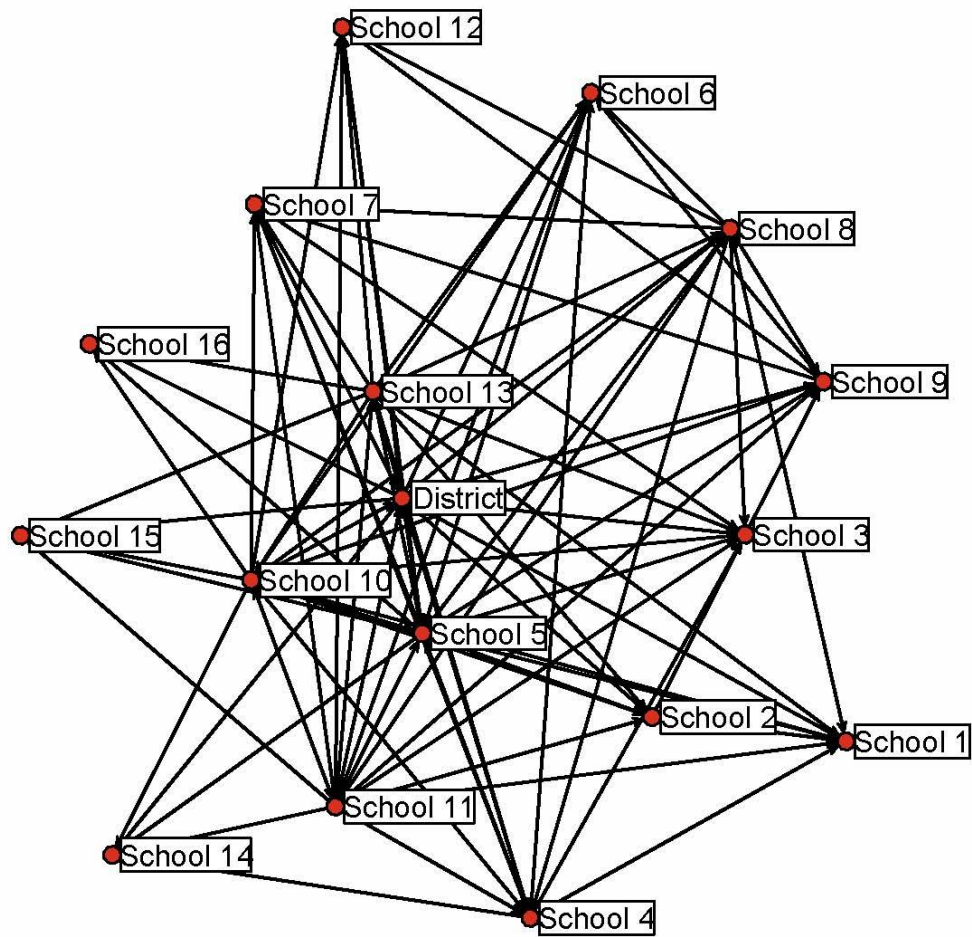
The mean degree dropped to 4.14 and the density dropped to approximately 4%.

These were small decreases, overall, but since this drop occurred with the removal of only one actor, this indicated that she had quite an impact on the network.

Further, the undirected centralization without this key district leader dropped to 9% – a small, but meaningful drop. This one actor's incoming and outgoing ties affected approximately 4% of the centralization in the network. However, the most meaningful drop was in the directed centralization. Without this one actor, directed centralization by outdegree dropped from 85% to 26%. This actor was responsible for a large portion of the outgoing connections. Without her in the network, one person dominated less of the outgoing connections. This indicated that 1) this district leader was a key actor in the network and 2) she was a hub of the hierarchical communication structure. She dominated one-way conversations by sharing information with district and school staff. However, I wanted to see to what extent the district, as a whole, carried one-way conversations with school staff.

To view connections at a more aggregated level, I created a block model. Each individual's response from a particular school, with the district representing its own entity, was blocked together to form one node, or point in the graph. If even one tie existed between system actors, the tie existed at the block level. As evident in Figure 4, there were connections between schools, but the district was at the center of the network.

Figure 4. School Block Model Network Graph



Different blocks were more connected than others. Degree indicated how active different blocks were in the network. Table 6 provides the degree for block.

Table 6

Blocked Network Degree Centrality

School 1	0.32
School 2	1.16
School 3	0.64
School 4	0.44
School 5	1.13
School 6	0.35
School 7	0.51
School 8	0.62
School 9	0.49
School 10	1.02
School 11	0.93
School 12	0.30
School 13	2.14
School 14	0.54
School 15	0.78
School 16	1.13
District	3.56

The district had the highest degree, meaning it was more involved in the network than any other block. I also examined betweenness, a measure to assess to what extent a block was between the shortest path between two nonadjacent blocks (see Appendix G for more description of betweenness). The block in between could potentially control the information or interactions of the nonadjacent blocks (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The block level betweenness is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Blocked Network Betweenness Centrality

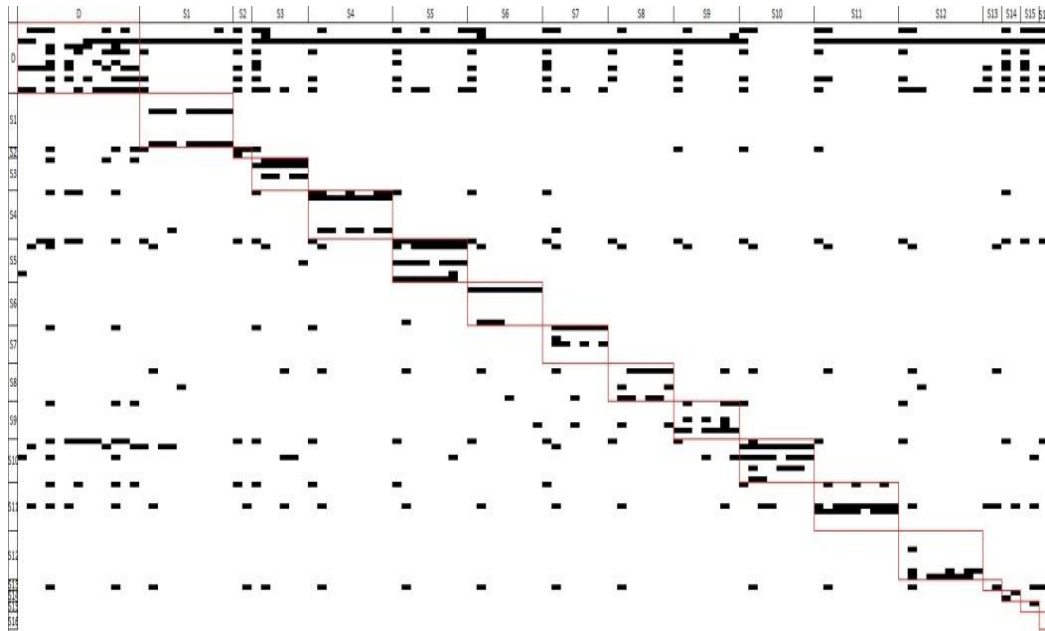
School 1	0
School 2	0.17
School 3	0.13
School 4	2.58
School 5	21.58
School 6	0.25

School 7	0.63
School 8	2.33
School 9	1.13
School 10	8.08
School 11	4.33
School 12	0
School 13	1.21
School 14	0
School 15	0
School 16	0
District	38.6

As expected, the district had the highest betweenness scores. Ciudad district staff mediated connections between school actors and appeared to have a large amount of control over mission discussions, further evidence of their move towards a more centralized approach.

Ciudad Matrix. To better understand the district’s position in the network, I examined the matrix of connections between the 110 system actors included in the surveys’ Social Network Analysis items. As further described in Appendix G, in a network matrix, each cell has a 0 for the absence of a tie between actors or a 1 for the presence of a tie. The rows represent outdegree and the columns represent indegree. To show the pattern of connections, I colored cells with ties black (Figure 5). I placed district staff at the top rows of the matrix and grouped system actors by school in the subsequent rows. To organize the data for each school, I placed the principal as the top row for each school block, then the “lead counselor” who served as the chair of the counseling department, and then the rest of the counselors (see Appendix G for more explanation of colored matrices).

Figure 5. Matrix with Colored Connections by School and District Blocks



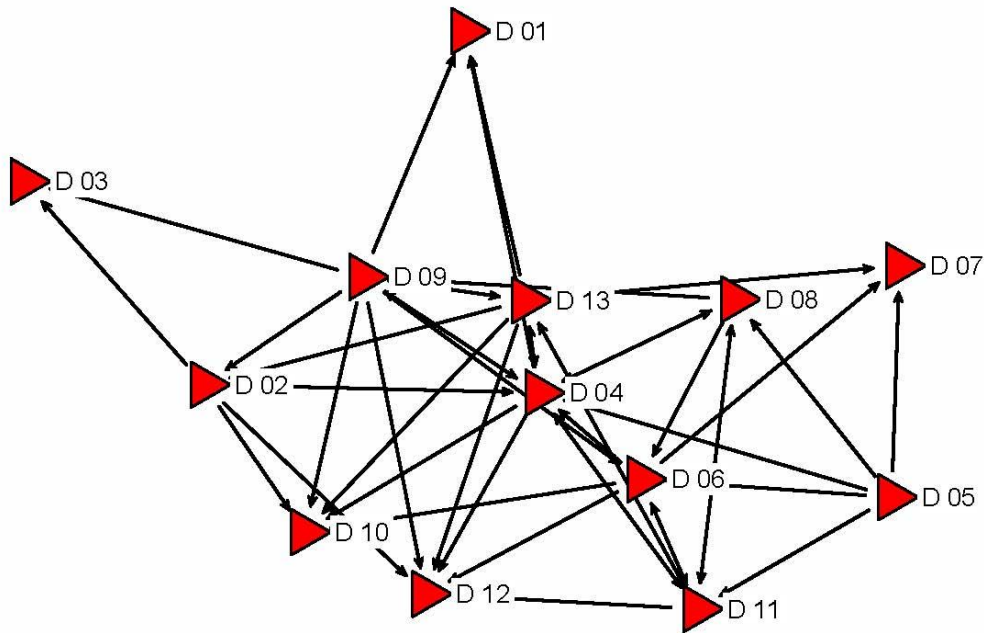
The diagonal pattern of connections (highlighted by red boxes around each school or the district entity) showed that the largest concentration of connections existed within each entity. School staff were primarily talking to other staff at their school. District staff named connections across a broad range of schools.

Interestingly, it appeared as though district staff named school actors as outgoing ties (the top few rows of the matrix) more frequently than school staff named district actors (the first few columns on the left side of the matrix). In other words, the district outdegree to schools was much larger than district indegree from schools. District staff reported that they held regular discussions with school staff, but school staff did not reciprocate, perhaps because the discussions were more one-sided and informational from the district to schools – most likely in meetings. Information was likely going out to schools from the district, but most school staff were likely not sharing information back up to the district. This suggested a hierarchical structure to mission discussions.

Ciudad Sub-Network Structures. To better understand these relationships, I created sub-networks of different combinations of system actors by role (e.g. district staff, principal, counselor). In this section, for each sub-network, I will provide graphs and measures of network structures including network centrality and density. As I was most interested in measuring the extent to which one actor dominated one-way conversations in these sub-networks, I will present directed centralization measures for each network. These network combinations, or sub-networks, further supported the notion of a hierarchical district position.

District Staff Network. District staff, as a discrete network, appeared to be highly connected and active (N=13). As demonstrated in Figure 6, while the key district leader remained at the center of the network, there were multiple connections across and between individuals. The mean degree was 3.85, quite high for this small network. The density was 30%, much higher than the overall network density of 5%, and the highest of any sub-network. District staff were engaged with each other in discussions about the mission.

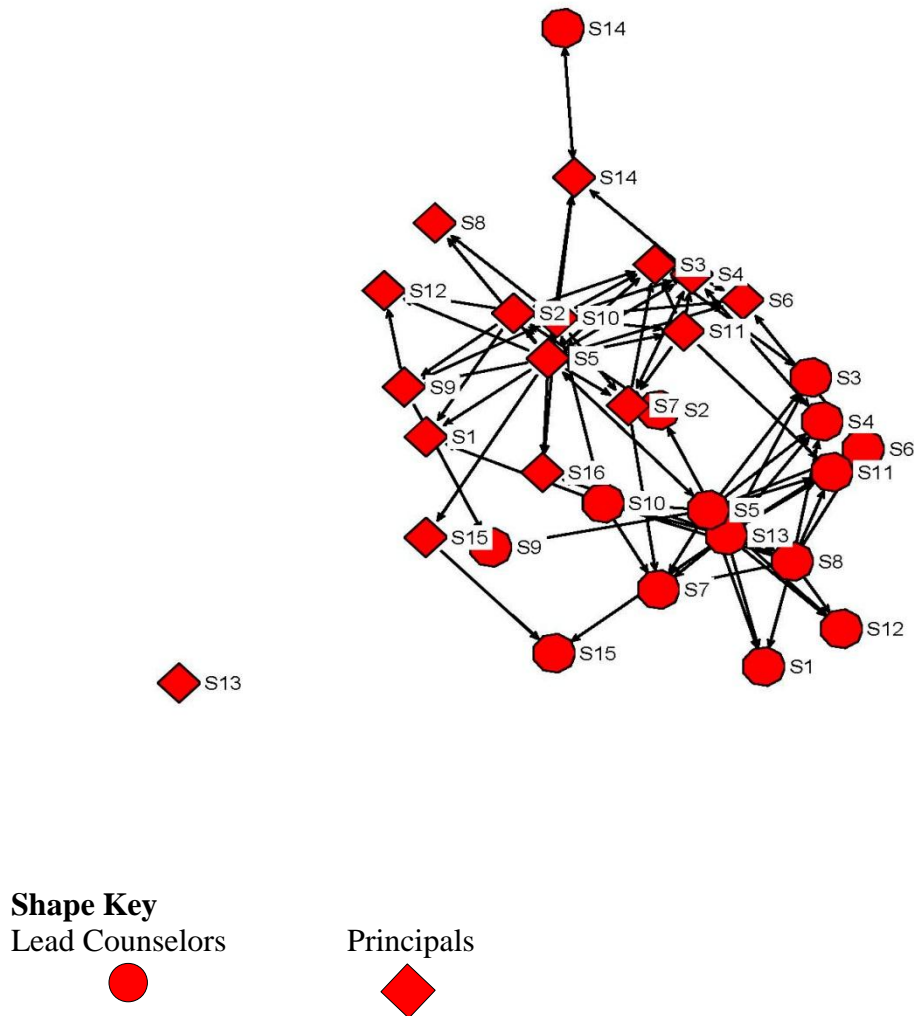
Figure 6. District Staff Network



Discussions in this sub-network largely appeared to be two-way communications. The directed centralization was 40%. One actor dominated outgoing connections to a lesser degree in this network than in the overall network. The arrows in Figure 6 indicate incoming and outgoing ties which, numerically represented, are the indegree and outdegree of each actor. The arrows in Figure 6 were pointing in multiple directions to multiple individuals. District staff appeared to be regularly discussing the mission with each other.

Principals and Lead Counselors Network. To view interactions at the school level, I created a sub-network of lead counselors (who had more connections to other schools and the district than other counselors given the nature of their roles) with principals (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Lead Counselor and Principal Network



In this network ($N=31$), the mean degree was 3.42. While this mean degree was similar to the district network mean, this network was nearly three times as large so many more connections were possible. The density was 10% – quite a bit lower than the district network density of 30%. The directed centrality, based on outdegree, was 41%. This centrality indicated that, in this network, a single actor did not dominate the majority of outgoing connections to the extent

observed in the overall network. This outdegree directed centrality was similar to the district network. However, the network was less densely connected than the district network. Counselors were largely clustered together on one side of the network, and principals were on the other side of the network. Discussions were largely within roles (e.g. principals talked to principals, counselors talked to counselors) or within schools (e.g. S5 principal connected to S5 lead counselor). There were a few key principals at the center of the principal cluster; similarly, a few key counselors were at the center of their cluster. Principal and counselor average outdegrees were similar: 3.13 for counselors and 3.68 for principals. This structure suggested that school-level actors discussed the mission with each other, and no one group dominated one-way communications.

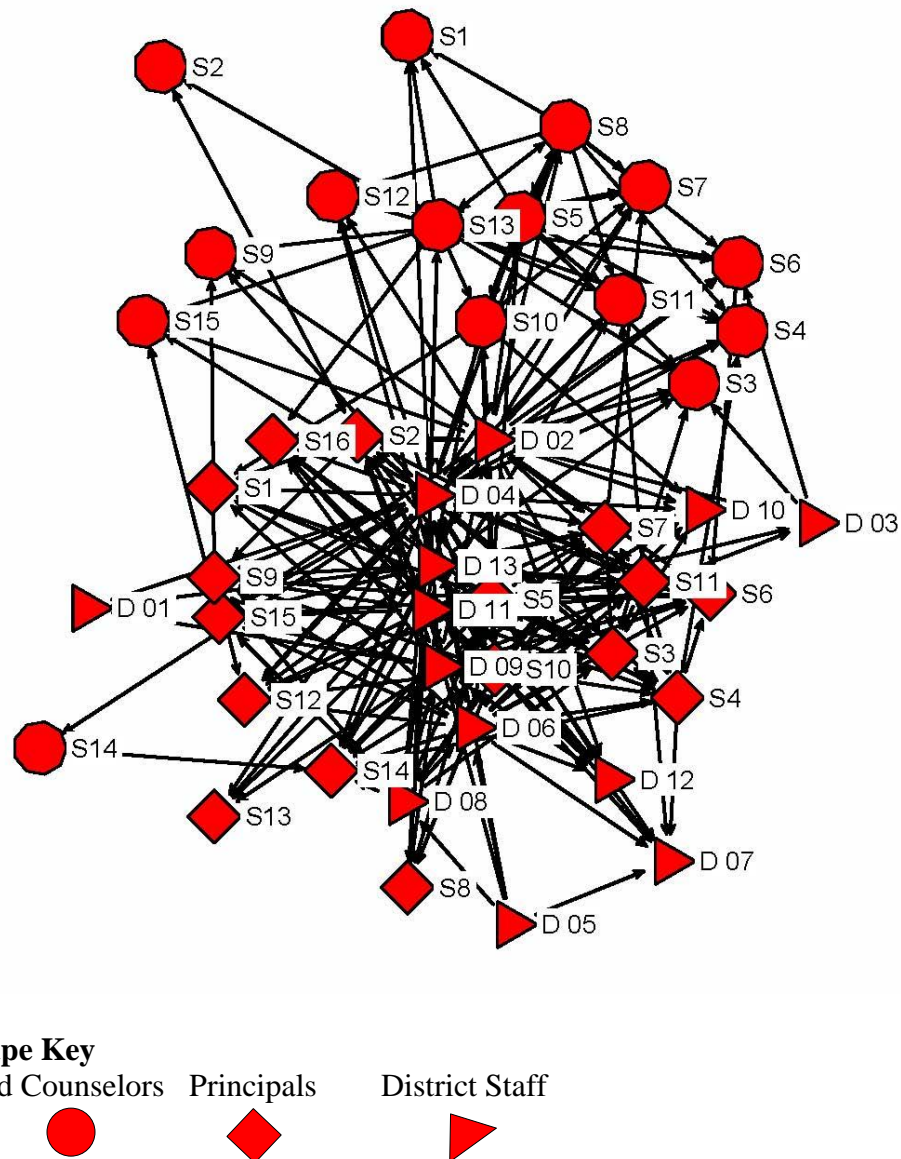
District, Principals, and Lead Counselors Network. To see the district influence on the shape of this sub-network, I added district staff to the principal and lead counselor network to create a new sub-network (N=43). The resulting network (Figure 8) was very similar to the previous structure, except that district staff filled the space in the middle and appeared to bridge the counselor and principal clusters. The mean degree was 7.03, so each individual, on average, was connected to 7 others in this sub-network. Of course, the key district leader had a large number of both district and school connections. In this smaller network, she drove up the average, so the mean degree was not very comparable to the other sub-networks or to the larger network.

The density was 16%, notably larger than the 10% density of the same network with just principals and lead counselors. This is notable because in a

larger network there are more possible ties, and you would expect density to decrease. This increase further demonstrated that the district had a large number of outgoing ties to school staff. The inclusion of district staff meant that more connections existed, even in this larger network than principals and counselors alone. District staff were bridging more connections between each other and school staff.

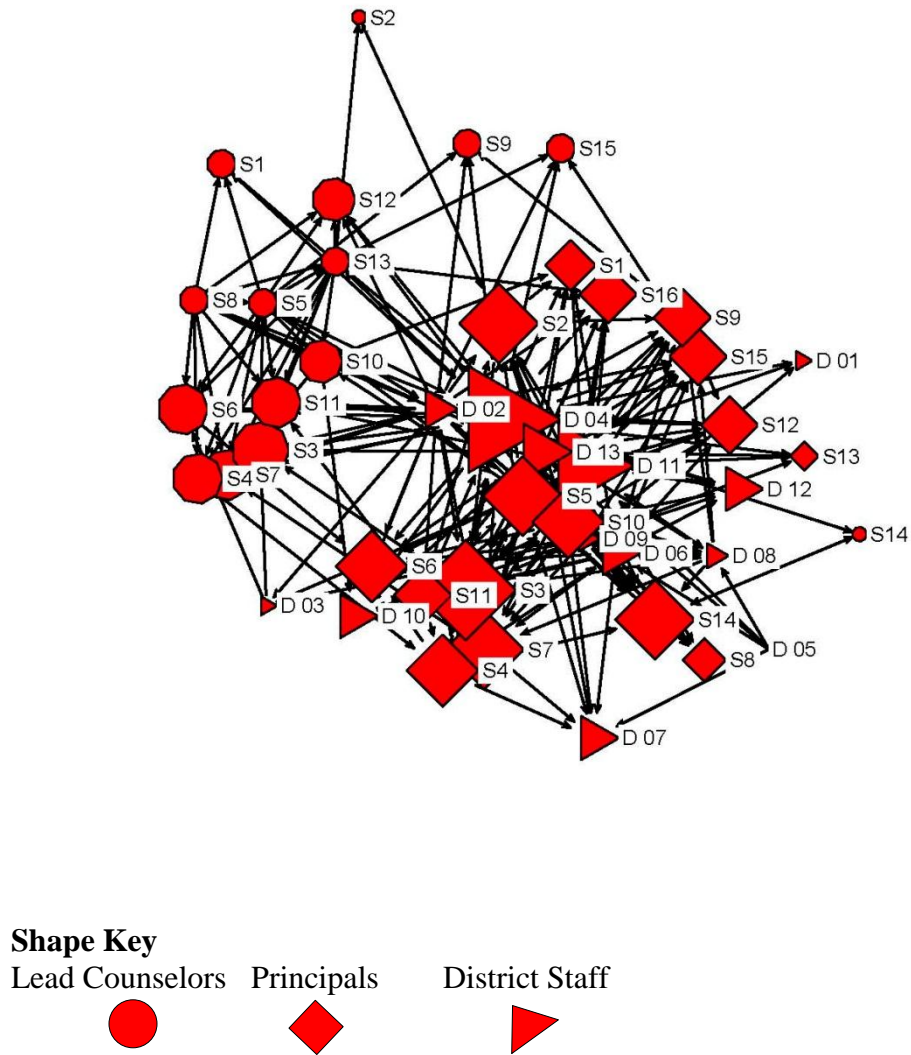
The directed centrality based on outdegree was 72%. While the district sub-network and the principal and lead counselor sub-network both had directed centralities around 40%, in this sub-network that brought district- and school-level leaders together, one person dominated more of the outgoing connections. This further supported the notion that the district led one-way communications around the mission and its related policies.

Figure 8. Lead Counselor, Principal, and District Network



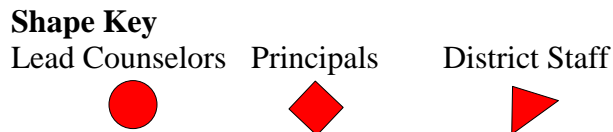
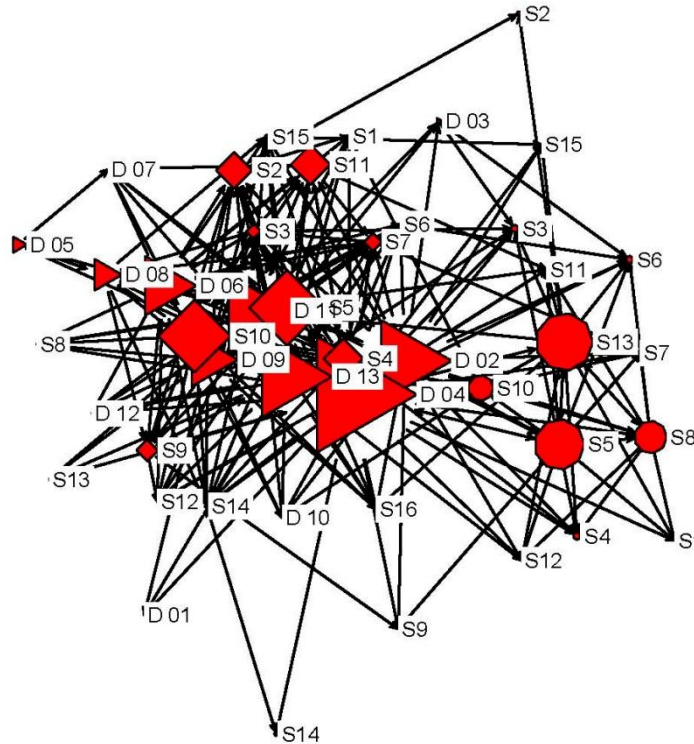
To further examine the influence of district staff on this sub-network, I sized nodes (points for each individual) by indegree and outdegree. Viewed by indegree, (Figure 9) there were several key district staff, principals, and counselors spread throughout the network.

Figure 9. Lead Counselor, Principal, and District Network Sized by Indegree



Yet, when viewed by outdegree (Figure 10), district staff stuck out as large nodes, along with a few principals and counselors. While indegree was more distributed across the network, outdegree was visibly larger for district staff.

Figure 10. Lead Counselor, Principal, and District Network Sized by Outdegree

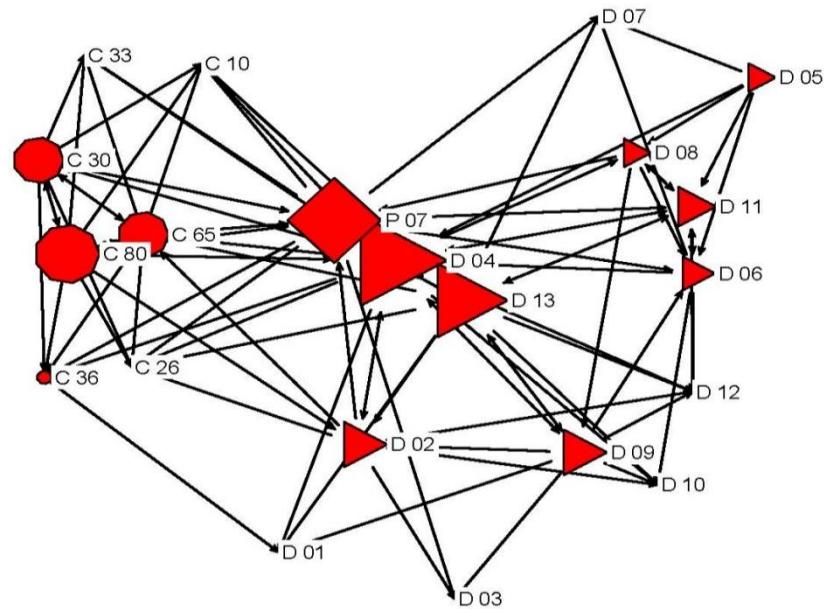


These network views further supported the notion that Ciudad district staff were driving discussions about the mission.

School Network Structures. I wanted to understand the district position within the context of my two focus schools, Plaza and Mercado, so I created two separate sub-networks: the principal and counselors from Plaza with district staff and Mercado counselors and the principal with district staff.

Plaza and District Network. In Figure 11, district staff and Plaza school staff (N=21) nodes are sized by outdegree.

Figure 11. Plaza and District Staff Network Sized by Outdegree



Shape Key

Plaza Counselors Plaza Principal District Staff



The Plaza sub-network appeared quite connected, though district and school staff appeared on opposite sides of the network. The network had a mean degree of 5.05. Though this was similar to the overall network, as a small network, outliers had a bigger impact on the average. Therefore, the mean degree was not comparable to the overall network. Thirteen actors in this network (62%)

named at least one other actor at Plaza or in the district as someone with whom they regularly discussed the mission. The density was 24%, nearly as dense as the district sub-network and denser than the district, principal, and lead counselor network. Plaza staff, then, were discussing the mission with each other and some district staff. The directed centralization was 59%. In this network, one person held the majority of outgoing connections to a greater extent than in the district or principal and lead counselor sub-networks which were of similar size.

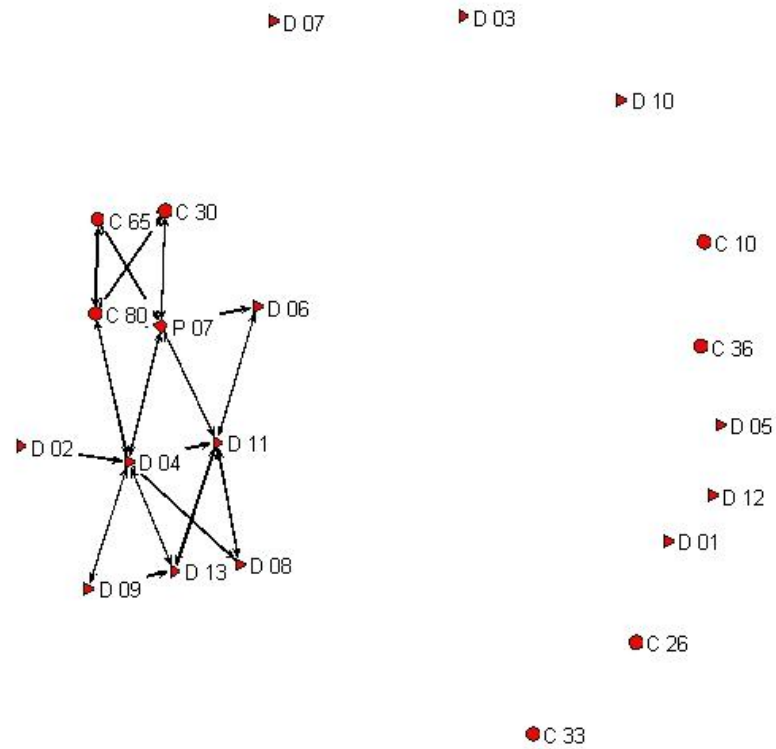
In this Plaza model, the key district leader, the principal, and the lead counselor held the most prominence. The key district leader had the highest outdegree, naming 16 others in Plaza or at the district office as people with whom she regularly discussed the mission. Another important district staff member, a curriculum director, named 13 others in this network, the same as the principal. The lead counselor (C80) named nine others.

I was most interested in the district to school relationship; therefore, I removed the district to district connections (as they inflated district staff degree) and kept only district/school or school/school actor relationships. Looking at just these relationships, the principal had the highest outdegree at 12, followed by the lead counselor at 9, and then the key district leader at 8. The principal also had the highest indegree at 9, followed by a counselor (C26, not the lead counselor) who had been in her position at Plaza for several years. Six district staff had an indegree of 1 from school staff; the key district leader had an indegree of 2 from Plaza school staff. It is important to note that Plaza was located in close proximity to the district central office; they likely had more interaction with

district staff than other schools. Yet, school staff still had higher indegrees from school staff than district staff had from school staff. The district was sending information out to Plaza, but few Plaza staff had direct connections back to the district.

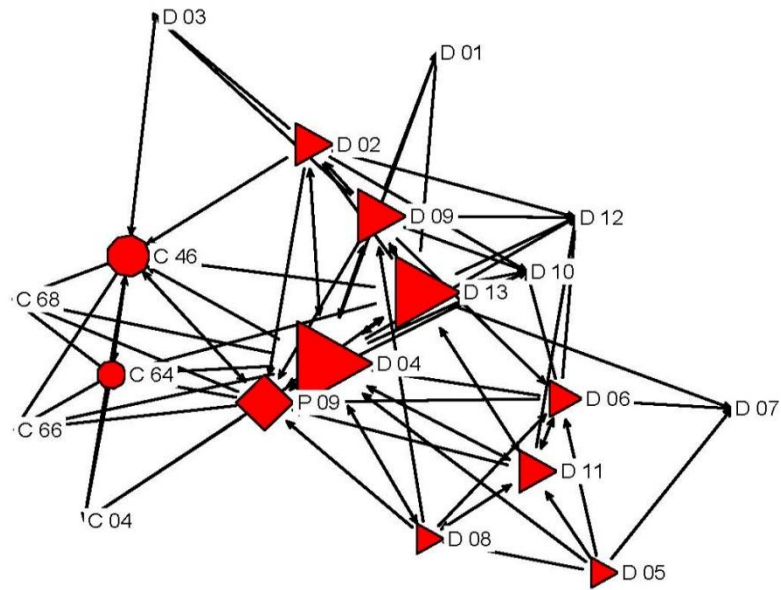
Since Ciudad appeared to communicate around the mission in a hierarchical structure, I examined reciprocated relationships to see how often district and school staff nominated each other. In reciprocated relationships, both actors nominated each other in the survey as someone with whom they regularly discussed the mission. As demonstrated in Figure 12, while the Plaza principal and lead counselor had reciprocated relationships with three district staff; all other reciprocated relationships were district staff to district staff or school staff to school staff.

Figure 12. Plaza Reciprocated Connections



Mercado and District Network. The Mercado network with nodes sized as outdegree (Figure 13), also demonstrated the importance of district staff in school-level networks.

Figure 13. Mercado and District Staff Network Sized by Outdegree



Shape Key

Mercado Counselors Mercado Principal District Staff



Similar to Plaza, district and school staff were generally on opposite sides of the network, and there were many connections between actors. The Mercado sub-network (N=19) had a mean degree of 4.42, so each individual, on average, was connected approximately 4 others in the network. Twelve actors in this network (63%) named at least one other actor at Mercado or in the district as someone with whom they regularly discussed the mission. The density was

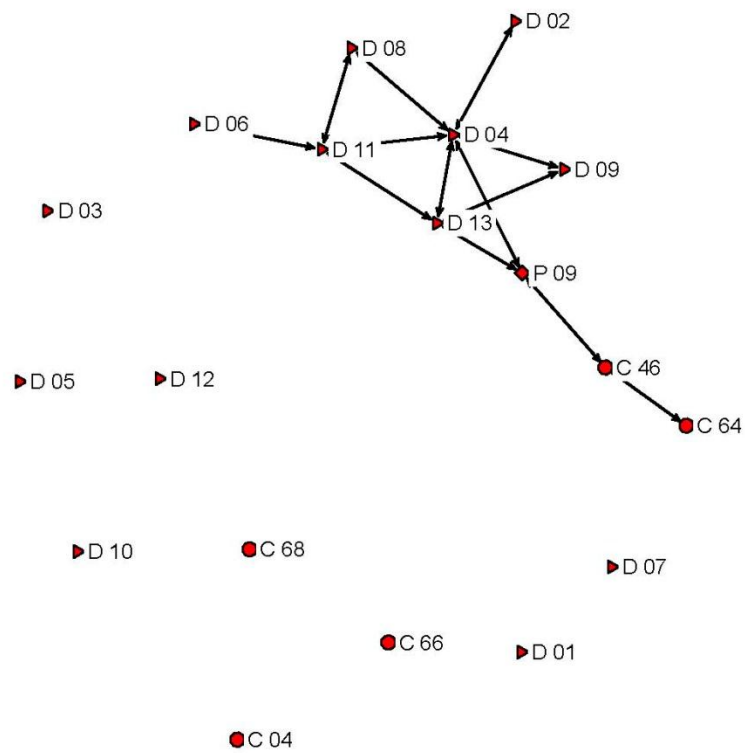
similar to Plaza's sub-network at 23%. The directed centralization was similar to Plaza's at 59%; one person held the majority of outgoing connections in this network to a greater extent than in the district sub-network or the principal and lead counselor sub-networks.

In this Mercado and district model, several district staff had the highest outdegree. The key district leader, like in Plaza's model, had the highest outdegree (14) closely followed by a curriculum director (12), and a curriculum supervisor (9). These district staff were followed by the principal in terms of outdegree (8), then another district leader (7), and then the lead counselor (6).

To see district/school and school/school relationships, I removed district to district connections and recalculated indegree and outdegree. In terms of outdegree, the principal had the highest outdegree (8) followed by the lead counselor and the key district leader (6). District staff had a smaller indegree in this network than in the Plaza network. Three district staff had one incoming connection in the Mercado network; all school staff had four or more incoming connections.

In a hierarchical structure, few district to school relationships would be reciprocated, as information flowed out to schools from the district. I examined reciprocated connections, or relationships in which both actors nominated each other. As demonstrated in Figure 14, only the Mercado principal had reciprocated relationships with two district staff; all other reciprocated relationships were district staff to district staff or school staff to school staff.

Figure 14. Mercado Reciprocated Connections



Shape Key

Mercado Counselors Mercado Principal District Staff



Mercado had less reciprocated connections than Plaza and less overall connections to the district. Plaza was, however, located in close physical proximity to the district office and that could have facilitated more exchange between district and school staff.

The two focus schools in this study were similar in terms of their network's mean degree, density, and centrality. Further, in both schools, district staff had the highest outdegree as they discussed the mission with a variety of system actors. Yet, without district to district connections, the principals had the highest outdegree in both school networks. Principals were connected to district staff and their own school staff, discussing the mission with both groups. Similarly, the lead counselors had high outdegrees in the school networks as they discussed mission-related topics with counselors and the principal. The school-level networks demonstrated, at a micro-level, what I saw in the larger network: Ciudad district staff drove discussions about the mission as they discussed the mission with each other and certain principals and lead counselors, but the primary structure of district-school connections was a one-way relationship with the district sharing information in a hierarchical communication chain.

Though Ciudad was a site-based district where principals had a lot of power and schools had a large amount of flexibility, district staff held a central role in discussing the mission with school-level actors. However, most conversations appeared to be one-sided as district staff had higher outdegrees than indegrees in the Ciudad network, and there were few reciprocated relationships. If discussions about the mission were district-driven, the district may not have been learning from schools about promising practices.

The district was moving towards a centralized model of more guidance and clearer expectations in an effort to ensure consistent outcomes. Advisory, for example, was a small attempt at a more centralized, standardized approach based

on a successful school strategy, but the district did not require all schools to implement the same model or to even implement it at all. Consequently, the program was unevenly and inconsistently implemented. Ciudad district staff were assuming a more hierarchical communication structure about the mission. Yet, the district was reluctant to take a top-down approach to implementing the mission and its related policies and programs.

As a site-based district, individual schools had flexibility to design programs that fit their needs. While this could foster innovation, such as Green Mountain's Advisory program, it could also give a lot of power to ineffective principals who could choose to what extent, if at all, they would implement promising practices. The site-based structure both fostered variation and limited the possibility for district-wide improvement. The district was trying to find a balance between mandating promising practices and providing flexibility and autonomy while, at the same time, ensuring more consistent, district-wide improvements.

Assertion #6: Lack of Measurement

The district lacked a cohesive measurement system for this initiative; thus, its progress was difficult to gauge. System actors generally believed that the district was moving in the right direction though there were few concrete changes.

Vignette: Lacking Meaningful Measurement

"In preparation for you, for this conversation," said a district leader, "I was flipping through Education Week and they did something on college and

career standards, and this is absolutely right. We have lofty goals, but the report finds that 31 states have college and career readiness standards, but fewer than half of them have any kind of measurable way to measure that preparation, and we're the same thing," he remarked. I was slightly taken aback. When I reviewed the district goals for this mission, I was struck by how broad and undefined they were. Yes, the district lacked a way to measure their goals, but I was impressed that this district leader would so readily acknowledge this. This was our first interview. We had only met a few times before. I was delighted that he would be so forthright this early in the process.

"We're talking about college and career preparedness," he continued.

"What are we doing? Well, look at our shiny brochure. We have the 4+4 Plans, the AVID program, and all of these great things, and yet we still lack a meaningful system of measurement," he concluded. He handed me the article with sections highlighted and phrases circled. At the time, I did not fully understand how important his observation would be.

Goal Coherence. The district outlined goals for the mission; however the goals were vague. As described in Chapter 1, the goals did not include metrics or clear outcomes. Goals included:

- Increase number of students across all demographic groups who enroll in post-secondary options.
- Increase number of students across all demographic groups who apply for and earn scholarships for post-secondary study.
- Increase parent awareness of preparing for college and career.
- Increase higher-level course-taking for students across all demographic groups.
- Increase participation of students taking college entrance exams.
- Increase implementation of high standards and increased rigor in academic programs.

- Increase percent of students demonstrating college-readiness in first year of post-secondary study.
- Increase percent of career and technical education (CTE) program completers.
- Increase rates of students entering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions.
- Increase number of student athletes entered into NCAA Clearinghouse by 10th grade to be eligible for scholarships.

Survey respondents were asked the importance of these goals and could select up to three goals as “Very Important” and up to three goals as “Important.” Table 8 presents the “Very Important” and “Important” ratings combined for each goal, by respondent group.

Table 8

System Actor Ratings of Goals: Very Important/Important Combined

	Teachers	Counselors	Principals	District
Enrollment in post-secondary	80%	91%	100%	89%
Scholarships	65%	91%	83%	57%
Parent awareness	75%	87%	64%	78%
Course-taking	55%	76%	64%	57%
College entrance exams	42%	54%	64%	50%
Higher standards and rigor	82%	67%	83%	86%
College readiness	65%	68%	75%	71%
Career and Technical Education	58%	31%	8%	44%
STEM professions	43%	20%	45%	63%
Student athlete scholarship eligibility	4%	8%	0%	11%

While there was general coherence among respondents that increasing enrollment in post-secondary options was one of the most important goals and increasing student athlete scholarship eligibility was one of the least important goals across all survey respondent groups, there were some notable differences. Teachers, principals, and district staff rated higher standards and rigor as one of the top two important goals with 82%-86% of respondents rating it as “Very

Important” or “Important;” counselors, however, rated five other goals higher. Interestingly, principals rated the goal related to career and technical programs lower than any other group. Further, only counselors and principals rated the goal of increasing scholarships within their top two. System actors tended to rate the goals related to their positions more highly than other goals.

Understandably, they wanted to feel that their efforts were helping Ciudad achieve its mission. Counselors, for example, worked closely with students to secure scholarship money, and nearly all of them rated it as an important or very important goal. Counselors did not rate rigor as one of the most important goals. They were not in classrooms and did not face rigor issues as directly as teachers. However, despite these small differences between respondent groups, there was general coherence around the goals of the mission.

Undefined Measures of Success. Though there was goal coherence, there was not consensus about how to measure the effectiveness of the mission in reaching those goals. In fact, respondents had over twenty different suggestions for how they assessed the extent to which the mission was effective, as demonstrated in Table 9.

Table 9

Student- and School-Level Outcomes

Student-Level Outcomes	School-Level Outcomes
Being “college-ready”	Decreased dropout rate
Being prepared for a four year university	Increased graduation rate
Performance on Advanced Placement exams	Decreased failure rate
Performance on ACT exam	More students in Honors/AP courses
Performance on state exam	More students taking ACT and SAT
Grade point average in high school	Meeting federal performance goals
Securing a job after high school	Amount of scholarship money secured

Enrollment in college or university	Attendance rates
Attending college or university	Discipline rates
Remedial courses in college	
Retention in college	
“Success” in college classes	
Completing college or university	

Strong student level outcomes contributed to strong school-level outcomes and vice versa. Yet, the district had not articulated which outcomes were the most important or how they related to each other. As a district leader noted, “We have too much data and too little insight,” (District Leader Interview 2011). There was not a comprehensive measurement system to track progress or provide insight into how well the mission was achieving its stated goals.

We always have students who go to college; we always will. I cannot say the district has ever given a solid measure of what success is in their eyes. How many attending college? How many actually earning a degree? Is solid employment history a good indicator? (Teacher SOC)

The district had not defined success. Without clear metrics, it was difficult for system actors to gauge if the mission was effective.

District leaders were focused on college-readiness outcomes. Though Ciudad students often entered the district behind grade level, district leaders wanted to ensure they were prepared for success in college.

I want to measure ourselves on the output. Because what we’ve historically done in urban schools, and in [Ciudad] also, is focus on passage of [the state test] in the 10th grade, and then kids just kind of limped to graduation as opposed to crescendoing toward graduation. I want to measure what percentage are ready for college this year, what percentage will be all ready for college next year, and change the conversation. (District Leader Interview 2010)

Many other respondents echoed this notion of measuring effectiveness based on successfully preparing students for college. However, as noted earlier in this

section, respondents had many different ideas about how to measure college-readiness. Was college-readiness measured by ACT scores, the number of students who enrolled in college, the number of students who completed college, a combination of these indicators, or other indicators entirely? Indicators were connected. Consequently, a measurement system that combined indicators would provide a holistic view of progress.

“What gets measured gets done,” noted several interviewees (District Interviews 2010, 2011). If someone was not monitoring the progress of certain activities, some system actors thought no one would do them. Yet, if nothing was measured, how would the district know if something was getting done? The district had not set benchmarks or goals to assess progress towards the mission of preparing every student for college, career, and life.

Gauging Progress. As the district was unclear on how it assessed its goals, school and district staff were unsure of its progress. Teachers, in particular, felt that they did not know how effective the mission was because results were not clearly communicated. “Most of the communication from the district is limited and therefore unclear to teachers what is effective and what is not,” said one teacher. Further, some teachers had concerns about the quality of the data, “I have not noticed any real effectiveness of any of these [programs or policies]; the data they use to promote it is not real,” (Teacher SOC). Some teachers did not trust the data; further, they felt they did not have access to the data they wanted. Teachers wanted to know college-going and graduation rates, ACT score

comparisons, and course-taking patterns but felt that these data were not readily available, were not accurate, or were not meaningful.

While the district had some of this information, there were limitations to the data. College enrollment rates, for example, only included public universities and colleges in the state. Students who attended a private school or a college or university out of state were not accounted for. Consequently, enrollment rates at certain schools could appear lower than they actually were. District-wide, 43.4% of students who graduated in 2009 enrolled in a public university or college in the state; school rates varied from 14.7% in the district's alternative school to 52.9% in one of the district's most diverse and low-income schools. The 2009 district-wide college-going rate was slightly higher than 2008 (41.2%), but lower than 2007 (44.2%). The rate vacillated between 40.3%-50.9% from 2000-2006. The slight growth between 2008 and 2009, therefore, may not have been related to the mission change in 2008-2009. Further, college enrollment rates alone could not be a sole indicator of success. As one teacher noted, "Increasing the number of students who enroll in college does not necessarily reflect their readiness for college." While respondents listed college enrollment rates as an important indicator of mission success, it was a limited measure.

System actors also mentioned the ACT, a college entrance exam that measured college preparation in English, math, reading, and science. The district secured grant funding to administer the ACT to all juniors in 2008-2009. However, at the time of this study, there were only two years of data available. In 2008-2009 the national composite ACT score was 21.1; the state average was

21.9; and Ciudad’s average was 15.7. Schools within the district had a range of composite scores from 13 in the district’s alternative school to 20.6 in the district’s specialized science-focused small school. In 2009-2010, the district ACT average increased slightly to 15.8, the lowest performing school increased to 13.7 and the highest performing school increased to 21.8. The mission changed in 2008-2009; it may have been too early to see changes in ACT scores.

Enrollment in AP, honors, and a “college-ready” curriculum were also noted as important indicators of success. The numbers of students enrolled in honors, AP, and IB steadily increased after the mission change, as indicated in Table 10.

Table 10

Honors, AP, IB Enrollment

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Number of Students	5,919	6,741	7,850	9,562
Number of Sections	830	937	1,013	1,083

This increase in enrollment, however, did not necessarily ensure students were ready for rigorous college courses. First, teachers were concerned that students were being enrolled in these courses without the academic preparation to thrive in them. Second, some teachers were concerned that Ciudad AP courses were not as rigorous as they should be in order to prepare students to pass AP exams and receive college credit.

I do not believe that increasing the number of AP classes without ensuring that those enrolled are prepared for that degree of rigor will increase the degree of success. Rather, we must increase rigor at all levels so that AP enrollment actually translates to higher achievement and passing the AP tests post AP course. (Teacher SOC)

Enrollment was not enough; teachers wanted courses to prepare students to pass AP exams. Teachers conveyed similar concerns about the rigor of honors courses. As one teacher noted, “Assigning students into an AP or Honors or IB class is meaningless without rigor, relevance, and results. If the criterion for 9th grade Honors English is 7th grade reading level, it is not honors,” (Teacher SOC). Though teachers were pleased that Ciudad schools were offering more AP, honors, and IB classes, they wanted these classes to challenge students and improve outcomes.

While the district tracked AP and honors enrollment, the district lacked an integrated data system to assess student course-taking. In order to be prepared to enter a state university, students had to complete four years of English, four years of math, three years of science with lab, two years of foreign language, one year of fine arts, and two years of social studies. District graduation requirements were not fully aligned with university entrance requirements, though the district increased graduation requirements for the Class of 2013 to be more aligned. System actors noted that it was revealing to track the number of students who completed a “college-ready” course sequence as an indicator of success. If students did not complete this course sequence, they would likely have to start at a community college instead of a four year university. While some schools reportedly tracked these data, the district did not track this important indicator of college readiness.

There were limitations to the data noted as indicators of this initiative’s success: college enrollment data only included public colleges and universities in

the state, the district only had two years of district-wide ACT data, enrollment in AP, honors, and IB did not necessarily correlate with college readiness, and course-taking patterns were not tracked district-wide. Even though the district lacked concrete measures of progress, system actors had impressions about the amount of mission-related change.

Impressions of Change

While system actors differed in their opinions about the amount of success related to the initiative, they generally perceived that the district was moving in the right direction. However, some participants indicated these changes were merely surface or were not enough to make a meaningful impact. System actors did not expect change to happen quickly. As one teacher stated, “Change is difficult and tedious in public education,” (Teacher SOC). A district leader reinforced the notion that change was gradual, though there was a point where the most change was possible.

I don’t expect instant success. I think that’s, again – first of all, it’s a fantasy. It’s black and white and the world is not that way. However, I also don’t expect folks to use that as an excuse not to get better....I think I probably could be moving faster than I am but I think that, you know, it’s kind of like if you pushed too fast, the organization spits you out. If you don’t push fast enough, you become absorbed into the status quo. It’s finding that sweet spot. (District Leader Interview 2011)

Ciudad was trying to find the balance between pushing towards its goals and moving at a pace where everyone could keep up.

When asked to what extent the district, as a whole, had changed because of this mission, as indicated in Table 11, the majority of system actors indicated “Some” or “Quite a bit.”

Table 11

System Actor Ratings of District Change Related to the Mission

	Teachers	Counselors	Principals	District
Very much	2%	0%	0%	11%
Quite a bit	16%	53%	58%	33%
Some	46%	30%	42%	56%
Very little	27%	18%	0%	0%
Not at all	10%	0%	0%	0%

There were interesting differences between system actors within each of the ratings. Teachers were the most skeptical of change related to the mission; 37% of teachers rated change in the bottom two categories while no principals or district staff selected these categories. Further, only teachers had “Not at all” responses to rate the extent of district change; all other groups rated change in higher categories. Yet, only teachers and district staff chose “Very much” to describe the extent of district change; the majority of counselors and all principals chose “Quite a bit” and “Some.”

District staff were, overall, the most optimistic about the amount of change in the district because of the mission; however, that is not surprising given that they had less day-to-day implementation responsibilities than school staff. Further, they were the champions of the initiative and may have wanted to see more change. Finally, district staff had a bigger picture view as they interacted with more schools.

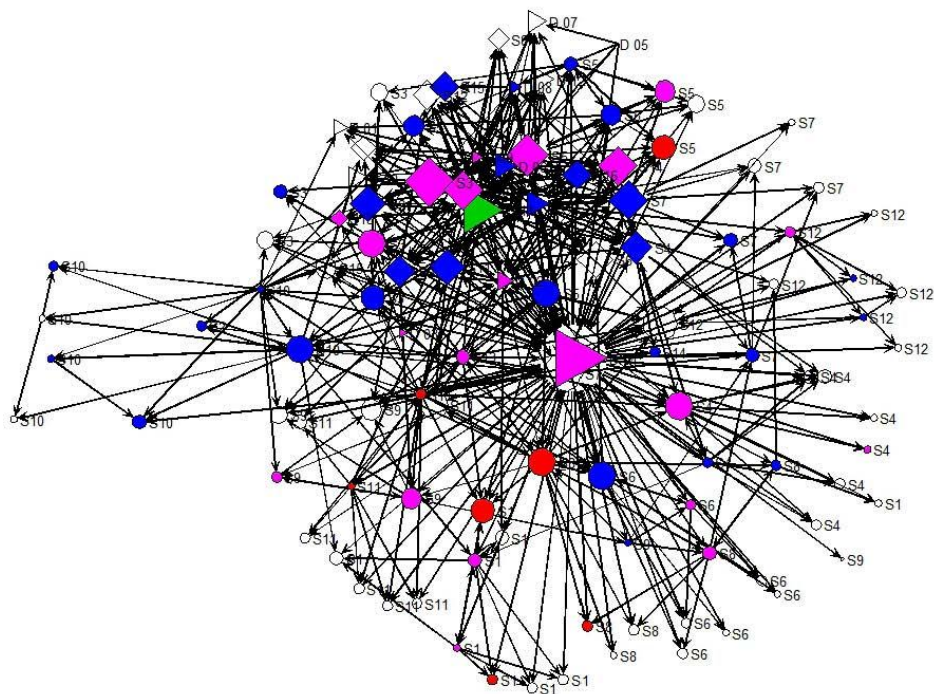
When examined as a network graph, Figure 15, there was an interesting pattern in the perceived amount of change because of the mission. It is important to note, as discussed in Chapter 3, that only district staff, principals, and




counselors were asked questions that could be analyzed using SNA. So, the network graph only represents these respondents groups.







In the network graph change is noted by color. Green represents “Very much”, blue represents “Quite a bit”, purple represents “Some”, and red represents “Very little.” No district, principal, or counselor respondents chose “Not at all.” The shapes represent the role of the individual: triangles for district staff, rectangles for principals, and circles for counselors. The size of the “node,” or each individual’s point, is determined by their indegree, or the number of system actors that chose an individual as someone with whom they regularly discussed the mission.

As shown in Figure 15, those with the most influence in the network, as measured by indegree, indicated they perceived “Some” change in the district.

Figure 15. Network Graph by Role and Perceived Change in the District



Shape Key	
District Staff	
Principal	
Counselor	

	Color Key
	Very much change
	Quite a bit of change
	Some change
	Very little change
	Did not answer change item

There were conflicting opinions about the amount of change related to this initiative. While more individuals (noted by the color blue) selected “Quite a bit” of perceived change, the most influential individuals in the network (noted by the color purple) chose “Some” perceived change. In survey open comments about the amount of change in the district, those who chose “Quite a bit” discussed the positive changes such as more focus on college and higher graduation rates, and described the district as moving in the right direction. For example, a respondent explained, “[There have been] significant increases in course rigor, including more AP and Honors, the implementation of AVID, more students applying for and being accepted into colleges....” (District SOC). Those who chose “Some” described change as a slow process and that it was too early to tell if the mission was ultimately making positive changes. “Change is hard and it takes time for people to buy-in,” (Counselor SOC). Those who indicated “Very little” described a lack of action, or too little action, to affect change. For example, “More words and less action equals the same results.” (Counselor SOC). System actors perceived Ciudad had achieved different levels of mission-related change.

Perhaps those influential individuals who noted “Some” change had a more realistic view of the mission’s implementation because they were connected

to so many others in the district and heard about implementation from various perspectives. Further, as implementation varied at school sites, those who were connected to more schools may have seen more varied levels of change. Consequently, they may have chosen “Some” as it balanced the different levels of change they may have witnessed.

Generally, interview participants discussed a culture shift towards higher expectations and outcomes for students.

That was a struggle to change the culture of a lot of people; it wasn't just counselors. [The mission] is now part of the culture. We register kids for full schedules; we expect them to have more math, more science, more world language. Our increase in AP classes has tripled in three years. The number of kids who take the PSAT has more than doubled [to] like 2,000 students. Are test scores, you know, thrillingly up? No, they are not, of course not. It is one very small incremental step at a time. But, we are getting there. At least the doors are opening and kids are coming through the door. Now, we just need to get them to, you know, do a little better. (District Staff Interview 2010)

Though there was a palpable culture change, most participants described the district as not yet at the tipping point towards becoming a college-going district. The mission was largely perceived as being an ambitious goal that drove district and school staff towards improvement.

I think that the mission means to me that we're always constantly striving to be better. Because I don't think we're there. And so I think the mission is high. I think the goal is high, and I think that's a positive thing because we're not there yet. And so that causes us to re-evaluate and look for ways to get there. And I think that's a positive thing because in education if you're stagnant, then I don't think you're at your best. (Counselor Interview)

Staff were working towards the goal, but ultimate changes were not yet perceived as having occurred. As a staff member noted, “We need to stay on course.... cultures don't change overnight,” (District SOC). Interviewed district staff and

principals discussed a time frame of 3-5 additional years to expect changes in student performance and outcomes because of this initiative.

Though participants did not expect immediate changes, they did note several successes. When asked about successes related to this mission, system actors thought that more students were aware of college as a viable option, more students were going to college, and more students were securing scholarship funds. As one teacher noted, “At our school, we work very hard to get every student ready for a four year university and have had a tremendous amount of success at it, especially in the last 3 years,” (Teacher SOC).

This notion that more students were going to college than in the past was prevalent, though the data did not necessarily support that perception. As noted earlier in this section, college-going rates had not appeared to increase because of this mission. However, system actors perceived an increase. “It seems,” said a teacher, “that more students are applying to, attending, and succeeding at the college level,” (Teacher SOC). It is difficult to determine if this perception was overstated. As college-going rates did not capture private or out-of-state college and university enrollment, it is possible that college enrollment was increasing, but it was not accurately captured by the data.

However, some participants perceived that there were no real changes or not enough change. “There are success stories, but too few,” said one teacher. “The successes are due more to the initiative of [e]specially motivated teachers than by any district implemented program,” said another teacher (Teacher SOC). Teachers, in particular, reported that they saw few concrete changes in district and

school practices related to the mission. “Since adopting this mission, our achievement levels have not risen, our students are not working any harder, and our problems seem to have remained the same. It seems to me we are far from accomplishing our stated mission,” remarked one teacher (Teacher SOC). Change, in this view, had not yet come to fruition.

Others acknowledged that there had been a culture shift, but it had not yet resulted in tangible changes. “I think it is a change in mindset but may not have been completely actualized across the district,” noted a teacher (Teacher SOC). While actions may not have yet changed, some realized that perceptions and viewpoints had. Yet, without clear metrics, how could the district know it was moving in the right direction? “So we have a lot going on,” remarked a district leader, “with little evidence of true, whether it’s implementation with fidelity or outcomes that, you know, they’re getting us where we need to be,” (District Leader Interview 2011). The district did not have clear benchmarks against which to measure its success, and they were aware of this issue.

Ciudad district and school staff had general coherence around the goals of the initiative. Overall, they agreed that the most important goal was increasing post-secondary enrollment. However, system actors did not agree on how to measure the success of the mission. Suggested measures were limited in their scope or their ability to demonstrate college readiness or success. Ciudad lacked clear metrics to measure the effectiveness of the mission; however, most participants perceived the district was moving in the right direction.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I presented six assertions and the data that led me to develop each assertion. Ciudad's mission was unevenly supported and implemented. While the mission's focus on college was clear to participants, the mission was a vague statement; and many system actors were confused about how the mission should change their day-to-day practices. Some questioned if the district was simply trying to look good by implementing this mission. Several incongruent practices further propagated skepticism among participants. Attendance and failure policies were lenient, and some system actors thought this undermined the district's efforts to increase rigor and student achievement.

Further, the two focus schools included in this study implemented mission-related programs differently to fit their contexts. Plaza faced decreasing student achievement and increasing federal sanctions, so the school focused its implementation of the mission on improving student achievement using structured curricula and programs. Mercado had a history of a strong career and vocational program, so it focused on providing balanced preparation for both career and college in a collaborative and strategic approach.

As Ciudad was a site-based district, schools had a lot of flexibility to implement programs to fit their needs. Consequently, promising practices, such as AVID and Advisory, were unevenly implemented. The district was trying to provide more guidance. However, district staff's one-way communication approach failed to gather and synthesize information about school-level implementation to improve district-wide implementation.

The success of the initiative was hard to determine. The district lacked a deliberate measurement system with defined outcome indicators. While staff generally thought the mission was improving the culture of the district, there were few specific changes or outcomes that system actors all agreed indicated success.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I conclude the dissertation by 1) summarizing the study 2) reviewing the findings 3) presenting conclusions aligned with the research questions 4) discussing implications and 5) providing directions for future research.

Summary of the Study

Previous studies have revealed gaps between policies, as intended, and policies, as enacted (Hargrove, 1975; McLaughlin, 1987; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Researchers have noted a need to study the complex factors that influence policy implementation (Honig, 2006a; McLaughlin, 2006). This study sought to understand implementation influences using complexity theory as a lens, complemented by established concepts about policy implementation.

In 2008, an urban high school district changed its mission to focus on preparing students for success in college, career, and life. This presented an interesting case of policy implementation and a unique opportunity to study who and what influenced implementation. The purpose of this study was to explain how, in a complex system, system actors and contexts influenced policy implementation into a varied spectrum of programs and actions.

The overarching research question was: how do system actors and contexts influence the implementation of a college-going initiative in an urban high school district? Sub-questions included:

- How can system actors' buy-in, knowledge, and interpretation of the policy goals be characterized?
- What roles do different system actors play in implementation?
- How do the interactions of system actors influence implementation?
- What variations exist in how the mission is implemented at the district and school levels?
- To what extent have system actors and schools adapted mission-related programs and policies to fit their contexts?

I sought to include a broad range of perspectives using a mixed methods design to understand this case of policy implementation. System actors, including district staff, principals, counselors, teachers, and students participated in this study.

District and school staff participated in surveys about their perspectives on the mission and its related policies and programs. I also interviewed staff and conducted observations and document review at the district level. Further, I conducted interviews, observations, focus groups, and document review in two comprehensive high schools in the district to gain school-level views of mission enactment.

Data were analyzed using modified inductive analysis and Social Network Analysis techniques to understand who and what influenced implementation of the mission in Ciudad.

Findings

I structured findings around six assertions, or statements of findings, supported by the various forms of data. The assertions included:

Assertion #1: Buy-in varied across the district. The emphasis on the college aspect of the mission particularly influenced differing levels of buy-in.

Ciudad system actors did not uniformly support the mission. Some participants were concerned that the mission was shallow and was merely a public relations effort. Others witnessed general resistance from their colleagues who did not want to change their practices and roles. Further, some felt that the mission was just another passing reform and would not be a sustainable focus in the district.

There was, however, general agreement that the mission focused on college. This focus divided system actors. Some, particularly district staff and principals, saw the college emphasis as a way to provide all students with preparation to be able to attend college, should they choose to attend. Others, particularly teachers, counselors, and students, saw the college focus as excluding students who had different goals or perceived options. In particular, some participants thought the mission was not realistic for undocumented immigrant students or underperforming students. These differing levels of buy-in affected system actors' actions and, ultimately, the implementation of the mission in Ciudad.

Assertion #2: There was confusion about what policies and programs were related to the mission, what the mission really meant, and how to operationalize it.

The mission was a general statement of the goals of the district to prepare students for college, career, and life. Consequently, the mission encompassed

many different activities, policies, and programs. There were several specific mission-related policies and programs including increased graduation requirements, 4+4 Plans, district-wide ACT testing, College Source, Parent Academic Success Academy, AVID, increased Advanced Placement classes, and NCEA Core Practice Framework. System actors were aware of these policies and programs and had varying opinions about their effectiveness. Yet, they also identified several other programs and policies as related to Ciudad's mission. Given its general goals, the mission could be associated with virtually any policy or program. Generally, participants were unclear on what the mission meant in practice and how their actions should change because of the mission.

Assertion #3: There was a conflict between the mission and district practices related to attendance and grading. This conflict created a sense of skepticism about the district's motivations and commitment to the mission.

Teachers and counselors noted two administrative practices they found incongruent with the mission: lenient application of attendance policies and the pressure to pass students. If students were not being held to account for their attendance, some participants felt that this would not only impact their learning, it could perpetuate bad habits that would affect their future employability. Further, some teachers reported that administrators pressured them to assign passing grades to students to keep school-level D and F rates low. This, teachers said, was lowering the rigor of courses and not meeting the district expectations of preparing every student for college, career, and life. In college, students would not be given multiple opportunities to pass a course, they reasoned.

These lenient policies left teachers and counselors to question administrators', and district staff's, motivations. Some thought these practices gave too much support to students; others thought the district was trying to look good at the expense of students' best interests. Ciudad staff were trying to balance expectations and support. They wanted to help students succeed, but to do so they wanted to maintain high expectations.

Assertion #4: Implementation varied at the school sites as schools interpreted the mission to fit their contexts.

The mission was implemented unevenly. In the two schools included in this study, the mission had different foci. In one school, the implementation focused on improving student achievement. In the other school, they tried to balance an emphasis on career and college. The schools had varying contexts, commitment to the mission, and capacity to implement the mission.

While the schools selected similar mission-related programs, they looked different in each school. Plaza chose a structured curriculum while Mercado chose a more flexible curriculum. At Plaza, Advisory focused on structured academic support; Mercado Advisory was less structured and included more social supports. The counseling department structures were also different in the studied schools. Counselors at Plaza experienced constant changes to their structure and organization, but Mercado High counselors were able to provide more individualized support to a more stable caseload.

As schools were able to define mission-related practices, the same programs looked different in Plaza and Mercado. The schools had different

contexts, capacities, and structures that heightened variations in mission enactment.

Assertion #5: The district's site-based management structure contributed to its uneven implementation of the mission and related policies. Consequently, the district was moving towards assuming a more hierarchal, top-down position to guide mission implementation.

Ciudad was a site-based district where individual schools had a lot of flexibility to determine their curricula, schedule, and priorities within the guidelines of the district. Ciudad's site-based structure contributed to uneven implementation of the initiative. First, the district's site-based structure provided principals the authority to determine what programs they would implement and to what extent they would follow district requirements. Second, this structure led to inconsistent implementation of policy elements across the district. Schools selected which elements they wanted to implement and decided the extent to which they would implement them. For example, schools implemented AVID and Advisory, two promising practices, very differently.

The district was moving towards more central control and clearer guidelines. Principals and counselors, generally, welcomed this change. Ciudad central office staff were the most active in networks discussing the mission and its related policies. However, district conversations appeared to be largely one-sided with school staff, and there were few reciprocated relationships across the network. While the district was reluctant to take a top-down approach, it was moving towards a more centralized structure. Yet, as the majority of district

connections were one-way, the district was not likely to collect, assess, and reflect on information about school-level implementation to the extent that could have advanced district-wide implementation.

Assertion #6: The district lacked a cohesive measurement system for this initiative; thus its progress was difficult to gauge. It was generally believed that the district was moving in the right direction, though there were few concrete changes.

Though the goals of the mission were vague, there was general coherence across system actors that increasing enrollment in post-secondary options was one of the most important goals. Yet, there was not widespread agreement on how to measure the effectiveness of the mission. Ciudad did not have clear metrics or a systemic process for measuring progress of the initiative. The district's progress towards the goals of the mission was difficult to assess.

Further, the data that was available was limited in terms of its ability to indicate the initiative's progress. For example, college enrollment data only included public colleges and universities in the state, providing only a limited understanding of Ciudad's college-going rates. Other data elements, such as enrollment in honors, AP, and IB or college preparatory courses were also limited in availability, scope, and relation to tangible outcomes.

Consequently, there were differing opinions on the success of the mission. While most respondents rated the change as "Quite a bit" or "Some", teachers were the most skeptical of change related to the mission. In surveys, no principals or district staff rated the change as "Very little" or "Not at all" but 37% of

teachers rated change in these bottom two categories. Those system actors with the most influence in the network, measured by indegree, rated the amount of district change related to the mission as “Some.” Change had started in Ciudad, but participants thought it still had quite a way to go. Though participants described several positive changes they witnessed because of the mission, many noted that it was still early in the process. Overall, there was general agreement that the district was making progress towards its goals, though how participants measured that progress varied.

Conclusions

The overall research question was: how do system actors and contexts influence the implementation of a college-going initiative in an urban high school district? In order to answer this question, I investigated five sub-questions that focused on different aspects of implementation.

Sub-Question 1: *How can system actors’ buy-in, knowledge, and interpretation of policy goals be characterized?*

Ciudad system actors were generally aware of the words and the spirit of the mission. They knew Ciudad was trying to become a college-going district. Though the mission had three parts (college, career, and life), participants generally agreed that the mission focused on college more than the other two aspects. Because of this emphasis, some system actors did not fully support the mission. Some felt that college was not a realistic option for many Ciudad students; others felt that the emphasis on college alienated students who did not want to attend college.

Teachers, in particular, were the most skeptical of the mission. While Ciudad's mission was rarely described by systems actors as top-down, it was primarily a district-driven initiative with a one-way, hierarchical discussion network, as noted in Assertion #5, and its message was a deliberate effort propagated by the district. Top-down initiatives rarely earn teacher buy-in (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Though this was not explicitly a top-down initiative, district communication around the initiative was becoming increasingly directive. If principals did not encourage school-level conversations about the mission, then teachers were likely to feel the mission was being imposed on them instead of feeling like active participants in its implementation.

Further, some teachers and counselors saw administrative practices around attendance and grading as incongruent with the spirit of the mission. These policies were applied leniently. This leniency, many school staff offered, taught students that they did not have to be accountable for their actions. In addition, it made teachers question the district's motives. Some school staff feared the district wanted students to pass courses just to make Ciudad's numbers look good. This perception limited school staff buy-in to the mission. Teacher buy-in is crucial for reform success (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000).

Individuals' policy interpretations and understandings shape implementation (McLaughlin, 2006; Spillane et al., 2006). System actors' actions define what the policy looks like in practice. Their support, or resistance, shapes how and to what extent a policy is implemented (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). In Ciudad, the mission was largely interpreted to be a college-going mission,

though some system actors did not support the mission's primary focus on college. In practice, mission-related programs and policies varied and were hard to define. The district's site-based structure provided schools with considerable leeway to define policy-related actions. In this structure, individual understandings and collective, school-level interpretations of the mission were even more important.

In fact, students from low-income communities garner much of their information about college from their schools (McDonough, 2004; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Therefore, Ciudad schools had a large responsibility for informing students of, and preparing students for, post-secondary options. Ciudad was trying to build a college-going culture, as that school culture was vital to preparing students for college (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Roderick et al., 2008). Yet, system actors, particularly at the school level, were not completely bought into the college-focus of the mission. Their lack of buy-in was a contributing barrier to full culture change in Ciudad.

Sub-Question 2: *What roles do different system actors play in implementation?*

District and school-level staff played different roles in the mission's implementation. District staff were connectors, mediating relationships between district and school-level actors. They served as boundary spanners (Honig, 2006b) within their own organization, connecting district staff and school staff around the mission and coordinating the flow of information or resources. The key district leader was a notable boundary spanner; she played a central role in the

mission communication network. She was tasked with overseeing the day-to-day implementation of the mission. This put her in contact with both district and school staff; therefore, she was central in the information flow. Within the district, several staff talked with each other about the mission and its related policies and programs. Yet, district staff had largely one-way communications to school staff.

Ciudad central office staff had not yet found a comfortable balance between top-down regulations and bottom-up supports. Central offices have historically engaged in top-down relationships with schools, though more collaborative relationships would have better supported implementation (Honig, 2006b). In this case, Ciudad district staff resisted a controlling top-down position and tried to afford schools a large degree of autonomy. Yet, school staff were asking for more guidelines and boundaries to define implementation. Site-based management, though an appealing concept, does not conclusively lead to increased buy-in, instructional improvement, or academic achievement (Malen, Ogawa & Kranz, 1990).

There was a middle ground between a directive, top-down approach and complete school-level autonomy; Ciudad central office staff had not yet identified that position. By helping school staff work within defined boundaries, district staff had an opportunity to enable implementation (Honig, 2009). They could provide clearer guidelines, more information about promising practices at other schools, and support to achieve school-level goals. The key district leader could

not do this alone. Other boundary spanners who could closely understand the issues of various levels within the organization would be necessary.

In previous years, the district had a lead counselor at the central office. She served as a buffer (Honig, 2009) between the schools and the central office. She provided information to counselors and gathered their questions and concerns. She brought counselor issues to district staff and provided counselors with actionable guidelines. Without this key boundary spanning role, counselors were confused about how to implement certain mission-related activities and did not have a dedicated advocate in the district.

Counselors had a very important role in the implementation of the mission; indeed, counselors have a central role in college-going efforts (McDonough, 2005). Counselors provided students with information about post-secondary options and support to pursue those options. However, school counselors had various competing priorities and had to balance several roles (Perna et al., 2008; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Ciudad counselors had case loads of hundreds of students to whom they tried to provide information on academic, post-secondary, career, and social/emotional issues. They held a lot of responsibilities and some felt they had little support. The two clearly defined policy elements – increased graduation requirements and 4+4 Plans – directly impacted counselors’ work.

In Ciudad, counselors were perhaps the group who had to make the most changes in their daily practices because of the mission. First, counselors had to ensure students were aware of post-secondary options. Instead of focusing on

registering students for the next semester, counselors had to work with students to plan eight years of their high school and post-secondary plans. Because of the mission, counselors took on more academic-focused issues. Further, they had to ensure they were serving all students, regardless of their post-secondary plans. In the past, counselors worked more with the lower performing or higher performing students, while average students may not have sought out a counselor's help. Counselors in both studied schools were trying to provide all students with more one-on-one attention to ensure they met the increased graduation expectations and to prepare for life after high school. Yet, at Plaza, counselors' caseloads were constantly changing, and they had few opportunities for tailored counseling to each of their assigned students. Mercado counselors had a more stable caseload and structured programs for preparing students for college and career options, but they, too, struggled with providing students one-on-one support. Counselors had a large role in the mission, but they wanted more support.

Teachers were unsure of their role in the mission. As the mission was a vague statement, many teachers did not know what the mission meant at the classroom level or how their actions should change because of the mission. While many described trying to improve the rigor of their courses, this was also a vague notion. Many felt that the rigor of the courses was not enough to prepare students for college or to pass AP exams. Further, teachers felt that administrators pressured them to pass students and, thus, they could not implement true rigor in the classroom. Teachers were also removed from the mission. They were the least aware of the different mission-related programs and policies. Not

surprisingly, they were also the group who perceived the least amount of change because of the mission. Implementation “falters” when teachers feel left out of the decisions to undertake a reform or initiative (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000).

Principals had a great deal of autonomy to select mission-related programs that best fit their school contexts. In Ciudad, principals had power. Certain principals were perceived as being able to influence district-wide decisions. Each school operated virtually independently of each other and the district office. In this model, principals had a significant responsibility to define mission-related programs at their site and to ensure their implementation. While this provided the district with opportunities for innovation, the school could also be limited by the principal’s capacity to lead the school towards implementing successful strategies. The principal is the “critical link” between policies and student learning (Danzig, Borman, Jones & Wright, 2007). If principals were not committed to the mission or lacked the vision to guide the school towards it, the school’s progress would come to a virtual halt.

Sub-Question 3: *How do the interactions of system actors influence implementation?*

Interactions between system actors helped shape the implementation of the mission in Ciudad. The district, in particular, held an influential role. District staff had the highest outdegree and betweenness scores in the network measures. They shared information in largely one-way communications, but they also bridged connections between unconnected school-level actors.

While Ciudad district staff were trying to centralize in order to improve implementation, Fullan (1992) argues that interactions between district and school staff, not the extent of centralization, are important factors in creating effective reforms.

Development at one level in the absence of development at the other level is ineffective for accomplishing improvement....The solution is neither more nor less centralization, but rather it lies in the area of increased interaction and negotiation between schools and area or central offices, and investment in the development of capacities at both levels. (p. 77-78)

Successful reforms rely on interactions between school and district staff to develop a supportive, systemic approach. Yet, to successfully engender improvement, interactions needed to be reciprocated. In Ciudad, interactions were largely one-way. This hierarchical structure did not appear to involve negotiation or development.

Consequently, the district was not learning from schools to the extent possible. Though some influential principals, such as the Green Mountain principal, did help influence the adoption of a program district-wide, this was only one program. Other, less connected, schools could have been implementing successful reforms, but the district may have been unaware of these successes. District staff had an opportunity to serve in a more supportive role for schools through increased reciprocal interactions.

Sub-Question 4: *What variations exist in how the mission is implemented at the district and school levels?*

Variability is expected in implementation (Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008). Local actors interpret policies into action, inevitably leading to variation. While

variation is expected, it can have positive or negative effects. Variation can provide new ideas and perspectives, leading to innovations and improvements (McLaughlin, 1987). Yet, variation can also mean that effective strategies are not implemented system-wide. In Ciudad, there were multiple variations of the mission-related programs and policies. However, there were not strict boundaries around what was considered a mission-related program. System actors related many programs to the mission; this study was not able to capture all of the variations. First, while district staff were aware that there were variations at the school level, they had limited awareness of the specifics. Second, because the mission encompassed many different programs, it would have been impossible to characterize all of the school-level variations.

The two focus schools in this study provided some insight into implementation variations. They chose different curricula that each felt would help them attain the goals of the mission. Each school had an Advisory program, but the programs varied in both structure and content. Finally, the counseling departments in each school had different approaches. One had structured supports for college and career preparation; the other had constantly shifting caseloads and less structured programs to support student exploration. These examples were merely the surface of the variations that existed in Ciudad.

Sub-Question 5: *To what extent have system actors and schools adapted mission-related programs and policies to fit their contexts?*

System actors adapted mission-related programs to a great extent. The district had limited involvement in defining school-level implementation. The

district provided few guidelines, though it was moving towards a more centralized structure around the mission. While the schools adapted the mission-related programs and policies, it was unclear to what extent this was a strategic adaptation to fit their contexts or merely a way to easily incorporate the mission into existing foci. Plaza was facing decreased student achievement and increasing external pressure to improve its performance. Consequently, Plaza used the mission as a motivating force towards improved student achievement. Mercado had an existing focus on vocational programs; its mission implementation focused on balancing college and career goals. Given its vague goals, the mission could fit into virtually any context.

Contextual factors influence what local actors do and what they consider to be effective implementation (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; McLaughlin, 1987). Even if a particular strategy worked well in one setting, it would not produce the same results in a different setting (Berliner, 2002; Morrison, 2002). This presented a conundrum for Ciudad. The district was trying to provide clearer guidelines for mission implementation. Yet, as contextual issues influence implementation, the district would not be able to completely define programs. Policies must allow for some level of flexibility to address local conditions (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). The district could, however, provide the support and conditions to enable implementation (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Honig, 2009).

Overall Research Question: *How do system actors and contexts influence the implementation of a college-going initiative in an urban high school district?*

This study demonstrated that system actors and contexts defined policy implementation in Ciudad. The mission was vague; it lacked clear guidelines for aligned programs and policies. System actors, then, had to interpret the mission's goals into actionable practices. This process of interpretation led to further variations in 1) which programs and policies schools used and 2) how policies and programs were implemented. In policy implementation, as McLaughlin (1976) described, there is a "mutual adaptation" process where local, micro, conditions combine with external, macro, dictates to change both the policy and the organization (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). The mission and its related policies and programs were starting to change practices in the schools; at the same time, practices in schools were changing the mission and its related policies and programs. Yet, mutual adaptation was not yet fully realized in Ciudad.

Advisory was a good example of this possible mutual adaptation. An influential principal implemented Advisory in his school. As the district learned more about Advisory, they wanted other schools to offer the program, too. As a bottom-up initiative, Advisory did not begin as an officially mission-aligned program. However, as district staff became aware of the program and endorsed it, Advisory became viewed as a mission-aligned program. The district asked principals to elicit buy-in for Advisory from their staff, but principals were able to secure staff buy-in to varying degrees. The district did not step in to provide clear

guidelines or expectations for implementation. Consequently, schools implemented wide variations of the program, if they chose to implement Advisory at all. Advisory was not a district-wide program, it was a district-wide concept with loosely defined boundaries.

If Ciudad district staff provided guidelines, information, or suggested practices or processes, Advisory may have been more consistently implemented throughout Ciudad. In their framework of loose coupling, Beekun and Glick (2001) suggest integration as “the process of coordinating the efforts of organizational actors towards a unified goal,” (p. 230). District staff, as integrators, could have identified the critical aspects of this bottom-up initiative and worked with principals and school staff to integrate these elements into schools. However, district staff failed to provide the mechanisms to help Advisory take hold as a consistent program in Ciudad. Instead, Advisory became a loosely defined concept and a highly varied mission-related program.

As complexity theory explains, members of an organization are both creating and reacting to organizational culture (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2002). The interactions between district and school staff helped define the mission. District staff set up the mission as a vaguely defined value statement; school staff reacted with limited buy-in and confusion about what the mission really meant in action. School staff wanted more guidance and clear expectations for mission-related actions. Consequently, the district was moving from a site-based management approach to the mission to a more centralized, hierarchical approach. Ciudad district staff were trying to find an approach that both

supported schools towards a common vision and provided flexibility for school-level adaptations.

Implications

Policies are often general statements intended to guide action. Their lack of specificity can encourage local adaptation and allow for flexible interpretations. While some degree of flexibility can facilitate effective implementation (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000), implementers also need actionable guidelines (Honig, 2009). Policy implementation is riddled with ambiguity. Different contexts and system actors can greatly influence implementation (Berliner, 2002; Honig, 2006a; Morrison, 2002). Further, administrators and teachers have to translate policy into programs and actions (Smith, 2004). These factors further underscore the need for system-level advocates who can provide direction, support, and information to foster successful adaptation.

In a complex system, such as a school district, external authorities cannot ensure particular outcomes, but they can create the conditions that support those outcomes (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Though district staff were not outsiders to the Ciudad system, they were external to each school. District staff had a unique opportunity to provide schools with guidance and resources to support implementation as integrators (Beekun & Glick, 2001) or boundary spanners (Honig, 2006b); however, Ciudad district staff had not yet defined their role. The district struggled between honoring principal power in a site-based management system with trying to ensure consistency through a top-down framework. Neither

extreme was likely to help Ciudad meet its goal of becoming a college-going district.

For the mission to be successful in meeting its goals, the district needed to clearly define the mission and its related programs and policies. Further, they needed to serve as a broker and coordinator, identifying promising school practices and providing opportunities for school staff to share successes across the district. Policy cannot determine actions, but district staff could help create conditions that support implementation success.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlighted the importance of district guidance and specificity in supporting policy implementation. A future study could focus specifically on the interactions between district staff and principals, characterizing the types of supports that would enable schools to define specific policy-related actions. Counselors were especially crucial to the implementation of a college-going initiative. A future study could focus on the specific information and supports counselors need from the district, principals, and teachers to effectively support students' college-going aspirations.

Complexity theory has been used to recommend distributed school leadership structures (Morrison, 2002); future studies could test to what extent a distributed leadership structure improved policy buy-in, clarity, or outcomes. Further, as the district tried to move from site-based management to a more hierarchical structure, future research could examine the extent to which these structures led to positive policy outcomes. The mission was too new in Ciudad to

assess its effectiveness, and, as described in Chapter 4, it lacked a cohesive measurement system. If Ciudad devised a measurement system or identified specific, measureable outcomes, future research in Ciudad could assess which mission-related programs led to improved outcomes.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: David Berliner
EDB

From:  Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB 

Date: 03/25/2011

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 03/25/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1103006229

Study Title: College Going Initiative District Study

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX B

2010 DISTRICT STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your district.
2. Tell me about your role in the district.
3. How would you characterize your district's relationship with the schools?
4. Tell me what you know about [REDACTED] college-going initiative.
 - a. Were you involved in developing it? If so, describe the process.
 - b. Tell me about the first time you heard about the program. Where were you? In meeting, read about it, etc? What do you remember was said about it?
 - c. Goals/elements of the initiative
 - d. Support/capacity building received
5. Who is involved in the initiative at your district and how would you characterize their involvement?
6. Who do you think should be involved in the district and at the school level? What role should they play?
7. What role do you play in this initiative? What role would you like to play?
8. What does this initiative look like in your district? How closely does that match what you think the district wants it to look like?
9. What do you think about the initiative?
10. What do you think other district staff think about this initiative?
 - a. What has given you that impression? Could you explain an event that led you to that conclusion?
11. Could you describe any positive or negative changes in your district that you attribute to this initiative?
12. What are some ways the college-going initiative could be improved?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about the college-going initiative?

APPENDIX C

2011 INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

District Staff

Part I: Focused Life History – Placing Participants’ Experience in Context

Please tell us about your personal background and academic experience and how you came to this District.

- Where were you born and grew up?
- Parents’ background – education & work? Are you the first in your family to attain a degree?
- What was your family’s view about education?
- Can you share a defining experience during your academic years that has influenced your current work?
- How did you come to work in the education field & become a district leader?

Part II: Details of Experience – Concrete Details of Participants’ Experience with the Implementation of the District Initiative

Please tell us about how you implement the new policy in your district.

- How would you describe your district?
- Tell me what you know about why the district changed its mission.
- What are the primary goals and expected outcomes of the current district college readiness initiative?
- How was this policy change communicated to schools, students and families?
- What is your role and the role of the leadership team in this initiative?
- What areas have you had to build capacity for your district because of this initiative? (structure/staffing, realigned resources, curriculum)?
- What changes have you made within the district to accommodate the district success indicators?
- What expectations do you have for schools in implementing this mission? How have you determined schools would be ready for implementation?
- What support do you provide your schools? How did you build their support for this initiative?
- How will you ensure sustainability of the initiative?
- What support do you need to be successful in your role of leading this initiative?

Part III: Reflections on Meaning – Intellectual and Emotional Connections to the District Initiative

Given what you have shared thus far about new policy, what does it mean to you as an administrator?

- What will need to occur for your district to prepare every student for college, career and life?
- How will this initiative support student learning & preparation for post-secondary success?
- If you were to walk on a campus, what would you expect to see that reflects the initiative?

- How would you characterize the relationship between the district office & schools?
- How do you think this initiative is perceived in your schools?
- What aspect of the implementation process has been most challenging/barriers? What has been most successful? What might you improve?
- Could you describe any positive or negative changes in your (school or district) that you attribute to this initiative?
- When speaking with individuals/groups outside of the district regarding the district initiative, what message do you convey?

Principals

Part I: Focused Life History – Placing Participants’ Experience in Context

Please tell us about your personal background and academic experience and how you came to this District.

- Where were you born and grew up?
- Parents’ background – education & work? Are you the first in your family to attain a degree?
- What was your family’s view about education?
- Can you share a defining experience during your academic years that has influenced your current work?
- How did you come to work in the education field & become a principal?
- How many years have you been a principal? In the district?

Part II: Details of Experience – Concrete Details of Participants’ Experience with the Promising Practice(s)

Please tell us about your experience with the new initiative?

- How would you describe your district? School?
- How would you characterize the relationship with the district office?
- Tell me what you know about why the district changed its mission.
- What are the primary goals and expected outcomes of the current district college readiness initiative?
- How was this policy change communicated to you & your school?
- How did the school determine its readiness to begin implementing the initiative? Who was involved in this decision?
- What is your role in the initiative?
- Who else is involved in this initiative at your school?
- Who would you go to if you had a question about the mission and/or its related policies?
- What expectations do you have for your school in implementing this mission? What areas have you had to build capacity for your school because of this initiative? (structure/staffing, realigned resources, curriculum)?
- Which of the district success indicators are the best measures of initiative progress?
- How will you ensure sustainability of the initiative at your school?
- What support do you need to be successful in your role with this initiative?

Part III: Reflections on Meaning – Intellectual and Emotional Connections to the Promising Practice(s)

Given what you have shared thus far about new policy, what does it mean to you as an administrator?

- What will need to occur for you prepare every student for college, career and life?
- How will this initiative support student learning & preparation for post-secondary success?
- What does the change in mission mean to you? Is the mission realistic? Can you elaborate?
- If we were to walk around the campus, what would you expect to see that reflects the initiative?
- How do you think this initiative is perceived in your school (teachers, students, families)?
- What aspect of the implementation process has been most challenging/barriers? What has been most successful? What might you improve?
- Could you describe any positive or negative changes in your (school or district) that you attribute to this initiative?
- If you were going to explain this initiative to others outside the district, what would you want them to know?

Counselors

Part I: Focused Life History – Placing Participants' Experience in Context

Please tell us about your personal background and academic experience and how you came to this District.

- Where were you born and grew up?
- Parents' background – education & work? Are you the first in your family to attain a degree?
- What was your family's view about education?
- Can you share a defining experience during your academic years that has influenced your current work?
- How did you come to work in the education field & become a counselor?
- How many years have you been a counselor? In the district?

Part II: Details of Experience – Concrete Details of Participants' Experience with the Promising Practice(s)

Please tell us about your experience with the new initiative?

- How would you describe your district? Your school?
- How would you characterize your school's relationship with the district office?

- What are the primary goals and expected outcomes of the current district college readiness initiative? How was this policy change communicated to your school, students and families?
- How did the school determine its readiness to begin implementing the initiative? Who was involved in this decision?
- What does the initiative look like in your school? Do you think it aligns with district expectations?
- What is your role in this initiative?
- Who else is involved in this initiative at your school?
- Who would you go to if you had a question about the mission and/or its related policies?
- Walk us through a day and highlight where and how you see this initiative being implemented in your practice & department?
- What do you need to be successful in your role with this initiative?
- Which of the district success indicators are the best measures of initiative progress?

Part III: Reflections on Meaning – Intellectual and Emotional Connections to the Promising Practice(s)

Given what you have shared thus far about new policy, what does it mean to you as a counselor?

- What will need to occur for you prepare every student for college, career and life?
- How will this initiative support student learning & preparation for post-secondary success?
- What does the mission mean to you? (If applicable: How is it different than the previous district mission?) Do you think the mission is realistic? Can you elaborate?
- How do you think this initiative is perceived in your school (principals, teachers, students, families)?
- What aspect of the implementation process has been positive or negative? What might be improved?
- Could you describe any positive or negative changes in your (school or district) that you attribute to this initiative?
- If you were going to explain this initiative to others outside the district, what would you want them to know?

Union Representative

Part I: Focused Life History – Placing Participants’ Experience in Context

Please tell us about your personal background and academic experience and how you came to this District.

- Where were you born and grew up?
- Parents’ background – education & work? Are you the first in your family to attain a degree?
- What was your family’s view about education?
- Can you share a defining experience during your academic years that has influenced your current work?
- How did you become interested in becoming a union representative?
- How many years have you served in this capacity?

Part II: Details of Experience – Concrete Details of Participants’ Experience with the Promising Practice(s)

Please tell us about your experience with the new initiative?

- How would you describe your district?
- How would you characterize the relationship between the district office & schools?
- Tell me why the district changed its mission and describe how the district operated before and after the initiative?
- How did you know the district was ready to implement this new initiative?
- How was this policy change communicated to the schools, students, families, & community?
- What changes have been made to accommodate the district success indicators?
- If you were to walk through a campus, what would you expect to see that reflects the initiative?
- What is your role in this initiative? How do you support the district leaders in implementing the initiative?
- Who would you go to if you had a question about the mission and/or its related policies?
- How will you ensure sustainability of the initiative in your district?

Part III: Reflections on Meaning – Intellectual and Emotional Connections to the Promising Practice(s)

Given what you have shared thus far about new policy, what does it mean to you as a union representative?

- What will need to occur for your district to prepare every student for college, career and life?
- How will this initiative support student learning & preparation for post-secondary success?
- What does the change in mission mean to you? Is the mission realistic? Can you elaborate?

- How do you think this initiative is perceived in the schools and in the community (principals, teachers, students, families)?
- What aspect of the implementation process has been positive or negative? What might be improved?
- Could you describe any positive or negative changes in your (school or district) that you attribute to this initiative?
- If you were going to explain this initiative to others outside the district, what would you want them to know?

APPENDIX D

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Tell us about your school.
2. What have you heard about your opportunities after high school?
 - a. Who did you hear it from?
 - b. When did you hear about these opportunities?
3. How many of you have parents who went to college?
4. What have you heard about your district's mission to prepare all students for college, career, and life?
 - a. What does that mean to you?
 - b. What do you think about this mission?
 - c. How do you think that mission affects you, if at all?
5. How would you describe this initiative to others outside your school?
6. What type discussions or activities do you have in your classroom about college and other options after high school?
7. Do you feel you will be academically prepared for after high school? Why or why not?
8. How did you select the courses you took during high school?
 - a. Who helped you select courses?
 - b. Did you fill out a 4+4 Plan with your counselor? Was that helpful in selecting courses?
9. What are your plans after high school? Why? Who and what led you to that choice?
 - a. Events at school/district
 - b. Teachers
 - c. Counselors
 - d. Parents
 - e. Other students

10. When did you start planning for what you will do after high school?
11. What are you doing now to prepare for your post-graduation plans?
12. What support do you need from your school now to successfully transition to life after high school?
13. Do you have anything else you would like to share about your plans post-graduation and what led you to that choice?

APPENDIX E

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your school.
2. Tell me what you know about [REDACTED] mission to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life.
 - a. How did you hear about it? From whom? When? How?
 - b. How was this policy change communicated to schools, students and families?
 - c. What are the primary goals and expected outcomes of the current district college readiness initiative?
 - d. Support/capacity building received
3. Who is involved in the initiative at your school and how would you characterize their involvement?
4. Who do you think should be involved in the district and at the school level? What role should they play?
5. What role do you play in this initiative? What role would you like to play?
6. What does this initiative look like in your school? How closely does that match what you think the district wants it to look like?
7. Walk me through a day and highlight where and how you see this initiative being implemented in your practice (curriculum, instructional practices, & materials)?
8. What do you think about the initiative?
 - a. What has given you that impression? Could you explain an event that led you to that conclusion?
 - b. Do you think the mission is realistic? Can you elaborate?
9. How do you think this initiative is perceived in your school (principals, teachers, students, families)?
10. What aspect of the implementation process has been positive or negative? What might be improved?

11. Could you describe any positive or negative changes in your school that you attribute to this initiative?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about the college-going initiative?

APPENDIX F

SURVEYS

Ciudad District Staff, Principals, and Counselors

How long have you worked in [REDACTED]?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years

How long have you worked in your current school?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years

How long have you worked in your current position?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years

In 2008-2009 [REDACTED] adopted a mission to prepare every student for success in college, career, and life. What do you think this mission means in practice?

To what extent do you think the district, as a whole, has changed because of this mission?

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Quite a bit
- ☐ Some
- ☐ Very little
- ☐ Not at all

Please explain what led you to choose this rating about the district's change.

Which aspects of the mission and its related policies are you familiar with? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Increased graduation requirements
- ☐ 4+4 Plans
- ☐ District-wide ACT testing
- ☐ College Source
- ☐ Parent Academic Success Academy
- ☐ AVID
- ☐ Increased Advanced Placement classes
- ☐ NCEA Core Practice Framework
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Which aspects of the mission and its related policies do you think are the most effective? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Increased graduation requirements
- ☐ 4+4 Plans
- ☐ District-wide ACT testing
- ☐ College Source
- ☐ Parent Academic Success Academy
- ☐ AVID
- ☐ Increased Advanced Placement classes
- ☐ NCEA Core Practice Framework
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Please explain why you think these aspects are the most effective.

What other college preparation activities have you seen be effective in your district [or school]?

Of the goals set out by the district for this initiative, how important do you consider each goal? Drag each goal into the box that indicates its importance (place up to three goals in each box):

Goals	Very Important	Important	Somewhat important	Not as important
<div>_____</div> Increase number of students across all demographic groups who enroll in post-secondary				

<p>options.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase number of students across all demographic groups who apply for and earn scholarships for post-secondary study.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase parent awareness of preparing for college and career.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase higher level course-taking for students across all demographic groups.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase participation of students taking college entrance exams.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase implementation of high standards and increased rigor in academic programs.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase percent of students demonstrating college-readiness in first year of post-secondary</p>				
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<p>study.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase percent of career and technical education (CTE) program completers.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase rates of students entering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase number of student athletes entered into NCAA Clearinghouse by 10th grade to be eligible for scholarships.</p>				
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To what extent do you think the district's activities are aligned with these goals?

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Quite a bit
- ☐ Some
- ☐ Very little
- ☐ Not at all

Please explain why you chose that rating of the alignment of activities with goals.

What other mission-related goals, if any, do you think the district should pursue?

When did you first hear about the district's mission to prepare every student for success in college, career, and life?

- ☐ 2007-2008
- ☐ 2008-2009
- ☐ 2009-2010
- ☐ 2010-2011

How did you first learn about the mission?

- ☐ District newsletter
- ☐ District memo
- ☐ District email
- ☐ District brochure
- ☐ District presentation
- ☐ District website
- ☐ Board meeting
- ☐ District staff member
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Counselor
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Please specify the name of the person from whom you first heard about the mission.

Do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies with anyone at the district office on a regular basis?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

With which district staff do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies on a regular basis? Select all that apply.

☐ LIST OF DISTRICT LEADER NAMES

Do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies with any principals on a regular basis?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

With which principals do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies on a regular basis? Select all that apply.

☐ LIST OF PRINCIPALS

Do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies with any counselors on a regular basis?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Which school(s) do(es) the counselor(s) work in? Select all that apply.

☐ LIST OF SCHOOLS

With which counselor(s) at [REDACTED] do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies on a regular basis? Select all that apply.

☐ LIST OF COUNSELOR NAMES

Do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies with anyone else on a regular basis?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

With whom do you discuss the mission and/or its related policies on a regular basis? Please provide the person's full name and role.

What successes, if any, has your district experienced in implementing this mission to prepare students for college, career, and life?

What barriers, if any, has your district experienced in implementing this mission and its related policies?

Please share any other thoughts you have about [REDACTED] mission to prepare students for college, career and life.

Ciudad Teachers

How long have you worked in [REDACTED]?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years

How long have you worked in your current school?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years

How long have you worked in your current position?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years

In 2008-2009 [REDACTED] adopted a mission to prepare every student for success in college, career, and life. What do you think this mission means in practice?

To what extent do you think the district, as a whole, has changed because of this mission?

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Quite a bit
- ☐ Some
- ☐ Very little
- ☐ Not at all

Please explain what led you to choose this rating about the district's change.

Which aspects of the mission and its related policies are you familiar with? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Increased graduation requirements
- ☐ 4+4 Plans
- ☐ District-wide ACT testing
- ☐ College Source
- ☐ Parent Academic Success Academy
- ☐ AVID
- ☐ Increased Advanced Placement classes
- ☐ NCEA Core Practice Framework
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Which aspects of the mission and its related policies do you think are the most effective? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Increased graduation requirements
- ☐ 4+4 Plans
- ☐ District-wide ACT testing
- ☐ College Source
- ☐ Parent Academic Success Academy
- ☐ AVID
- ☐ Increased Advanced Placement classes
- ☐ NCEA Core Practice Framework
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Please explain why you think these aspects are the most effective.

What other college preparation activities have you seen be effective in your school?

Of the goals set out by the district for this initiative, how important do you consider each goal? Drag each goal into the box that indicates its importance (place up to three goals in each box):

Goals	Very Important	Important	Somewhat important	Not as important
<hr/> Increase number of students across all demographic groups who enroll in post-secondary options.				
<hr/> Increase number of students across all demographic groups who apply for and earn scholarships for post-secondary study.				
<hr/> Increase parent awareness of preparing for college and career.				
<hr/> Increase higher level course-taking for students across all demographic groups.				
<hr/> Increase participation of students taking college entrance exams.				
<hr/>				

<p>Increase implementation of high standards and increased rigor in academic programs.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase percent of students demonstrating college-readiness in first year of post-secondary study.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase percent of career and technical education (CTE) program completers.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase rates of students entering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions.</p> <hr/> <p>Increase number of student athletes entered into NCAA Clearinghouse by 10th grade to be eligible for scholarships.</p>				
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To what extent do you think the district's activities are aligned with these goals?

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ Quite a bit
- ☐ Some
- ☐ Very little
- ☐ Not at all

Please explain why you chose that rating of the alignment of activities with goals.

What other mission-related goals, if any, do you think the district should pursue?

When did you first hear about the district's mission to prepare every student for success in college, career, and life?

- ☐ 2007-2008
- ☐ 2008-2009
- ☐ 2009-2010
- ☐ 2010-2011

How did you first learn about the mission?

- ☐ District newsletter
- ☐ District memo
- ☐ District email
- ☐ District brochure
- ☐ District presentation
- ☐ District website
- ☐ Board meeting
- ☐ District staff member
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Counselor
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Please specify the name of the person from whom you first heard about the mission.

What successes, if any, has your district experienced in implementing this mission to prepare students for college, career, and life?

What barriers, if any, has your district experienced in implementing this mission and its related policies?

Please share any other thoughts you have about [REDACTED] mission to prepare students for college, career and life.

APPENDIX G

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS DEFINITIONS, DESCRIPTIONS, AND

MEASURES

Social Network Analysis (SNA) provides graphic and mathematical examinations of connections between people. In this appendix I will provide definitions of different network measures, present a vignette to demonstrate how network measures are applied, and describe the meaning of different measures.

Terms:

See Wasserman & Faust (1994) for additional information on these concepts.

Node-a point in a graph to represent an actor or unit (e.g. school) in the network.

Line-represents a tie between actors or unit.

Degree-number of ties for an actor or unit.

Mean degree-average number of ties in a network.

Outdegree-the number of actors nominated by a particular actor.

Indegree- the number of actors who nominated an actor.

Density-proportion of ties present in a network, up to 100%.

Centrality-at the individual level, how active an actor is in a network determined by degree; at the network level, the extent to which one actor dominates the connections in a network. To compute network centrality, each actor's centrality is compared to the actor with the highest degree to create a difference score and index from 0-1.

Undirected centralization-centralization measure that does not take into account the direction of the connection (incoming or outgoing), index of 0-1.

Directed centralization-centralization measure that takes into account the direction of the connection (incoming or outgoing). Directed centralization can examine indegree or outdegree separately, index of 0-1.

Standardized degree centrality- proportion of ties an actor has in the network, 0-1.

Zero indicates no ties; one indicates an actor has all possible ties that exist.

Betweenness- a measure of actor centrality, the number of times the shortest path between two nodes who are not connected to one another passes through the node of interest.

To provide a detailed example of how a network is constructed and measured, I constructed a simulated network based off the following fictionalized vignette.

Vignette: The Mission Web

The district superintendent, assistant superintendent, and curriculum director were meeting to discuss progress around various grant proposals. The curriculum director, Nancy Fitch, had just finished describing how she and the curriculum specialist had woven the district mission into the applied science grant proposal they were going to submit that week. This reminded the superintendent, Dr. Harry Marsden, to ask Rachel Nichols, the assistant superintendent, about her meetings with the counseling staff from Lattimore High.

Rachel presented at a Lattimore counselors' meeting on the previous Tuesday. "Rachel, what did you cover in your meeting with Lattimore last week?" Dr. Marsden asked Rachel. "I presented a PowerPoint to the counselors and the principal about the new graduation requirements," Rachel explained. "I wanted to stress the coming state student education plan audit as well. We have to be ready as an entire district." "Good," answered Dr. Marsden, "we have a lot of work to do before those audits." "I also had a conversation with Principal

Franco and Lawrence Blake, the lead counselor,” Rachel continued. “They wanted to discuss the school’s efforts to help students with community college applications and funding. I think they’re pretty frustrated with changes that are affecting their undocumented students,” she concluded.

Later that day, another counselor, Matt, stopped by Lawrence Blake’s office. “Larry, I just noticed that we have new 4+4 forms again. What are we going to do about the fact that these don’t jive with the forms we used with last year’s juniors? Do we have to update everyone’s?” Matt asked. Lawrence replied, “Yes. Ted and Natalie also asked me about these forms last week. I’ve discussed how to go forward with Principal Franco. She said we need to bring everyone along to the new forms. Things will be changing as we develop and go forward. It’s best not to lose touch with the state requirements and have things dragging behind. In our next team meeting we’ll all get together and discuss the best ways to get this done between the six of us.” Larry replied.

Vignette Discussion and Introduction to Networks

At the heart of this short vignette was a web of social relationships. There were actors from the district office and Lattimore High School and they were talking about various aspects of the district mission. But, it was not as if everyone in the vignette spoke with every other person. The actors had a particular pattern of interactions. Researchers use interviews or surveys to capture this pattern of who spoke with whom. Through Social Network Analysis, researchers can present a web of relationships and measure certain features of the web’s structure.

In order to do this, after collecting survey or interview data, a researcher must first turn the data into a matrix of 0s and 1s to indicate the absence or presence of a tie. Using the vignette above, I generated survey responses to the question “With whom do you regularly discuss the mission and its related policies?” for each actor in this simulated network (N=11). I then created a matrix to represent survey responses indicating ties between the actors.

District and Lattimore Matrix of Connections

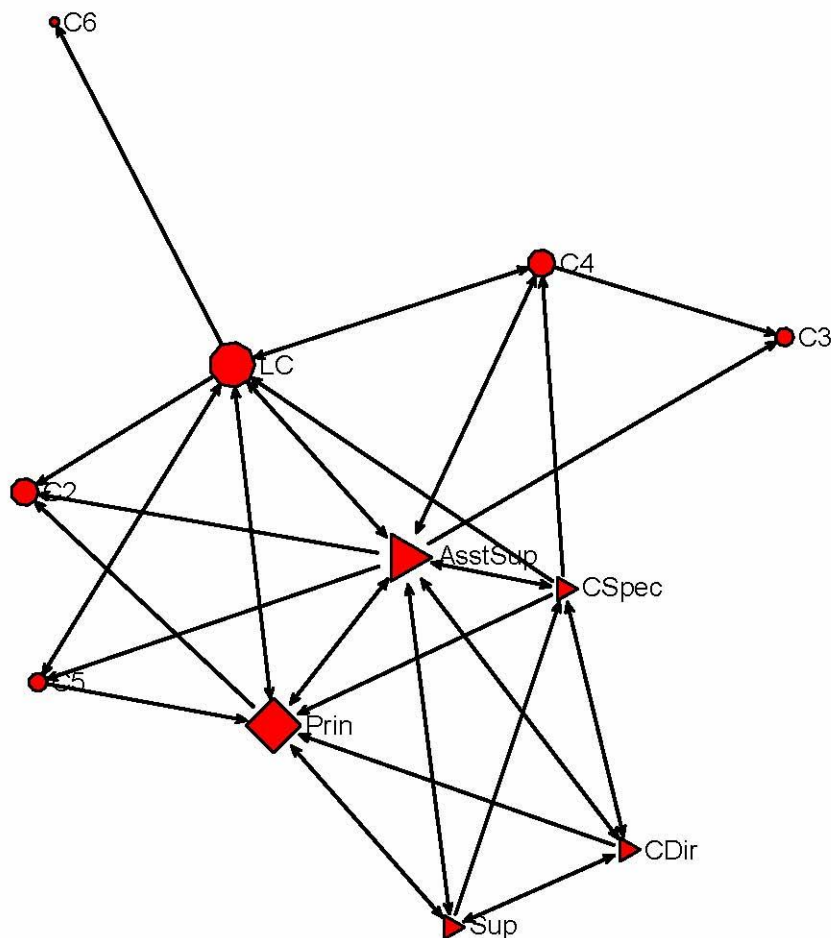
	Sup	ASup	CSpC	CDir	Prin	LC	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Sup	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
ASup	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
CSpC	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
CDir	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prin	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
LC	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
C2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
C3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
C4	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
C5	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
C6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Rows represent each actor’s outgoing ties; columns represent each actor’s incoming ties. In this matrix, the superintendent (Sup) had outgoing ties to the assistant superintendent, curriculum specialist, curriculum director, and principal, as indicated by the 1s in the first row. He had incoming ties (the first column) from the assistant superintendent, curriculum director, and the principal. Counselor 6 (C6) did not have any outgoing ties. This could be because counselor 6 did not complete the survey or she did not indicate ties to other actors. Looking at the column for counselor 6, she had one incoming connection from the lead counselor.

After entering data into a matrix, I then imported the data to R, a statistical software package that can conduct SNA. I also imported attributes such as labels (e.g. Sup), affiliations (e.g. district, Lattimore), or particular shapes to represent different actors (e.g. a triangle for district staff). After importing the data into R, I developed a script of syntax to generate SNA measures and graphs.

The figure below is a graph plot of the relationships underlying the vignette. All eleven actors are represented as nodes. Their relationships are represented with lines. The lines have arrows to indicate the direction of communication.

Lattimore and District Network Graph



Shape Key

Lattimore Counselors



Lattimore Principal



District Staff



In this graph, district personnel have triangle-shaped nodes; the principal has a diamond-shaped node; and counselors have circular nodes. The key feature to notice about the graph is where the triangles are located in relation to the circles and diamond. The triangles, district staff, are on one side of the network with several connections between them. The diamond, the principal, appears to be connected to many district and school staff. Circles, counselors, are connected (though often in one-way relationships) to the principal and assistant superintendent. Counselors, however, have many connections to each other.

Degree refers to the number of connections for an actor. The assistant superintendent, for example, had a total degree of 15, meaning that her outgoing and incoming connections added up to 15. She had an outdegree of nine, so she nominated nine people in the network as people with whom she regularly discussed the mission. She had an indegree of six, so six people nominated her as someone with whom they regularly discussed the mission. In the figure, the size of the nodes are based on indegree. The assistant superintendent, principal, and lead counselor had the highest indegrees in the network, as indicated by their large nodes.

Mean degree is the average degree across actors in the network. Mean degree provides a sense of how active actors are in network. In this network of 11 people, for example, the average degree was 3.63, meaning that, on average, each person had about four connections in the network. Every actor is not connected to

every other actor in this network; not all relationships are actualized. Density measures the extent to which relationships that could exist do. In a network where all actors are connected to each other, the density is 100%. In this simulated district and Lattimore network, the density is 34%. Therefore, 66% of the connections that could exist do not. In SNA, the meaning of the network's density, and the expected density, varies depending on context. In order to interpret density, researchers must understand it within the context of the organization and the phenomenon of interest. In this network, the majority of people are not regularly talking to each other about the mission. However, 34% is a relatively dense matrix when you consider that both district and school staff were included, as they have very different functions and roles in the mission.

As demonstrated in the Lattimore and district network graph, some nodes are closer together than other nodes. The visual of sense of distance between nodes gives us a sense of nodes that are more densely packed, for actors who shared more connections with each other. The graph also allows us to observe actors at the center who have the most connections. Conversely, actors at the periphery have the least connections.

Colored matrices can provide another visual representation of the pattern of connections. Using the data matrix presented earlier in this section, I colored cells that had a tie between actors black and left cells where there was no tie between actors white. The resulting colored matrix presented a clear visual pattern of network connections.

Colored Matrix of District and Lattimore Connections

	Sup	ASup	CSpC	CDir	Prin	LC	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Sup											
ASup											
CSpC											
CDir											
Prin											
LC											
C2											
C3											
C4											
C5											
C6											

As described earlier in this section, rows represent outgoing connections. The curriculum specialist (CSpC), for example, nominated the assistant superintendent, the curriculum director, the principal, the lead counselor, and counselor 4 as individuals with whom she regularly discussed the mission. Reading across the row for the curriculum specialist, those cells are black. Her incoming connections are represented in her column. The superintendent, assistant superintendent, and curriculum director named the curriculum specialist as someone with whom they regularly discussed the mission; those cells are also black. Looking at the incoming and outgoing connections for the curriculum specialist, her only reciprocated relationships (where both actors named each other) were with the assistant superintendent and curriculum director.

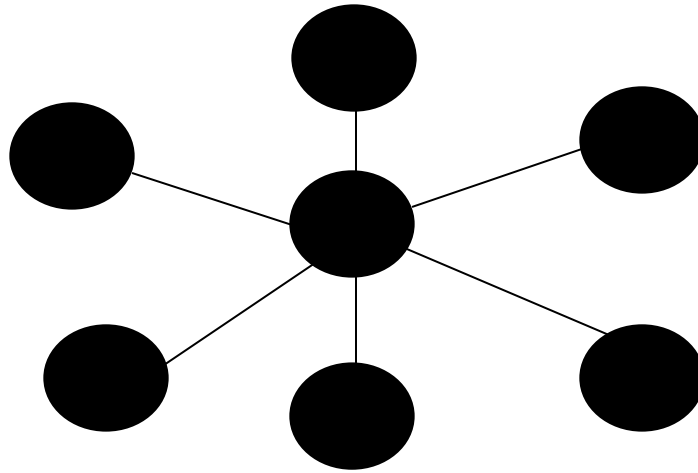
The top four rows of the colored matrix represent the district's outgoing connections; the remaining rows represent school staff's outgoing connections. The first four columns represent the district's incoming ties; the remaining columns represent school staff's incoming ties. Overall, district staff had more

outgoing connections (black cells in their rows) than incoming connections (black cells in their columns). Conversely, school staff had more incoming connections than outgoing connections.

To demonstrate how inter-connected district staff were to each other, I placed a red box around the rows and columns for district staff. The resulting box showed connections from district staff to district staff. I repeated the process for school staff, placing a red box around connections from school actors to school actors. Looking at these boxes, district staff were more densely connected to one another than school staff were to each other. This colored matrix revealed a pattern where district staff were more active in the network, especially with regard to outgoing ties to school staff. District staff appeared to be talking about the mission with each other and talking to some school staff in a one-way communication chain. Further, looking at this matrix and the network graph, the assistant superintendent appeared to be at the center of the network.

Social Network Analysis offers measures of network centrality to see to what extent one actor holds the most connections in a network. The higher the centralization measure, the more that a single actor dominates the connections and lies upon the majority of paths that connect other actors. Network centralization is calculated by comparing a given network to a star graph, one that is perfectly centralized.

Example of a Star Network



In the case of a completely centralized network, a particular actor has connections to each of the other actors and all the other actors only have connections to that same actor. The closer centralization is to 100%, the more one person holds the majority of connections in a network. In this simulated network, centralization was 32%, so it one actor did not dominate the majority of ties. In this case, centrality was calculated using degree (where the direction of the ties are irrelevant). This is referred to as undirected centralization.

Directed centralization takes into account the direction of the connection (incoming or outgoing). As noted earlier, the direction of the arrows indicates the direction of the connection. In matrices, rows represented outgoing connections and the columns represented incoming connections. Directed centralization is important because it acknowledges the differences between incoming and outgoing ties. One person can have a lot of outgoing ties as they talk *to* a lot of others in the network, but they can have few incoming ties because others do not

talk *to* them. In this network, the directed centralization was 51%, which was higher than the undirected centralization. This indicated that several connections were only outgoing or incoming. When I examined directed centralization by indegree only, it was 29% – one person did not dominate incoming connections. Directed centralization by outdegree only was 62%. The outdegree directed centralization was notably higher than the overall centralization and the indegree centralization. This means that one actor (or a few actors) dominated outgoing connections in this network.

Researchers can also examine centrality at the actor level. Actor-level centrality gives a sense of who is most active in the network. “An actor with a large degree is in direct contact or is adjacent to many other actors. This actor should then begin to be recognized by others as a major channel of relational information, indeed, a crucial cog in the network, occupying a central location,” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 179). Standardized centrality at the actor level allows researchers to compare centralities across networks of different sizes. As demonstrated in the table below, in this simulated network, the standardized degree, based on incoming connections, helped identify the two most active actors in the network.

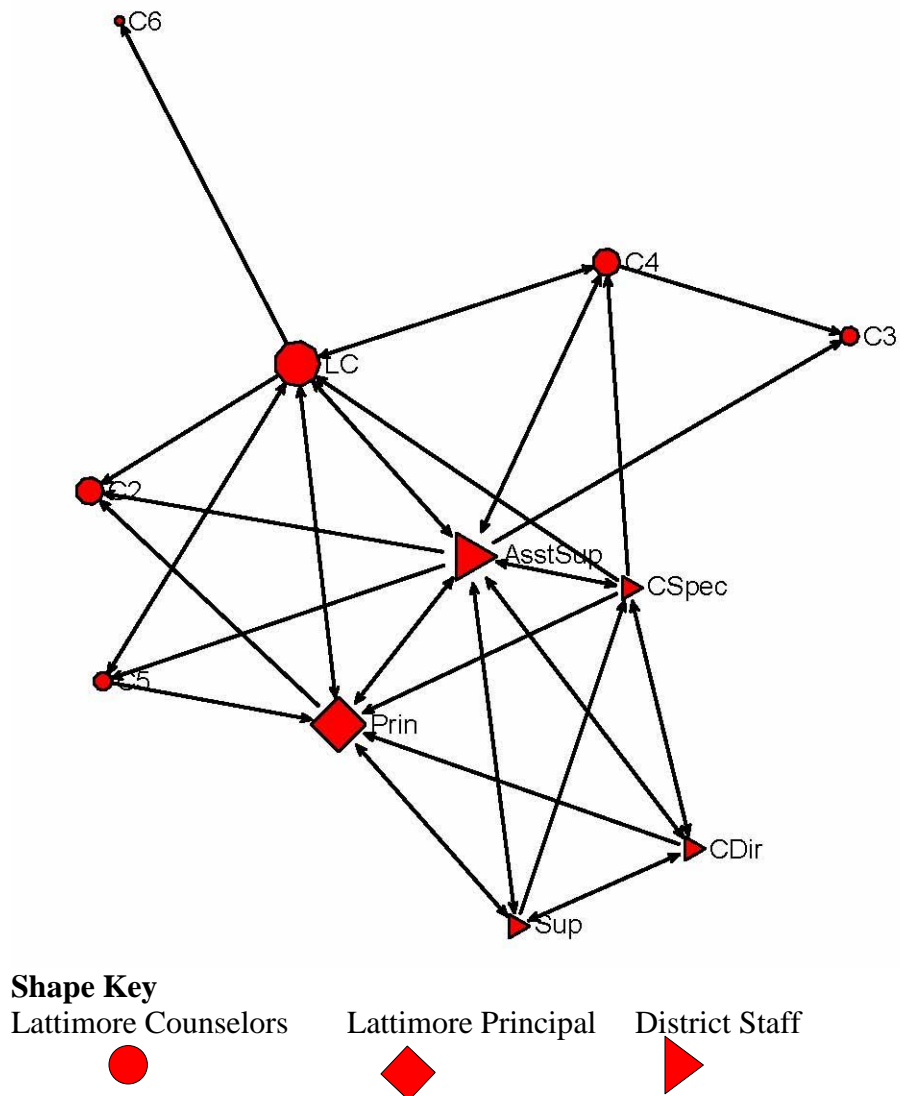
Actor Centrality

Actor	Indegree	Standardized Degree
Sup	3	0.3
Asup	6	0.6
Cspc	3	0.3
CDir	3	0.3
Prin	6	0.6
LC	5	0.5

C2	3	0.3
C3	2	0.2
C4	3	0.3
C5	2	0.2
C6	1	0.1

In this network, the assistant superintendent and the principal had the highest centrality and, thus, were the most connected and influential.

Lattimore and District Network Graph



The next feature of this figure to notice is that some of the actors seemed to be in between other actors, bridging the network. A number of district staff

were connected to each other and a number of counselors were primarily connected to other counselors. Because of this, the assistant superintendent (who had connections to otherwise unconnected district and school staff) and the lead counselor (who connected counselors to the principal and the assistant superintendent) had the highest betweenness scores. Betweenness assesses the extent to which ties between two nonadjacent (unconnected) actors depend on other actors. Betweenness values are an index between 0 and 1. If an actor had a betweenness score of 1, then all other actor relationships were based on passing through that one actor. The actor in between would serve as an intermediary, providing information or facilitating communication. The assistant superintendent betweenness score was 0.29 and the lead counselor was 0.25; they had the two highest betweenness scores in the network. The principal had the next highest betweenness score at .10. Though the principal had more connections than the lead counselor, the lead counselor served as a connector in this network. Two key actors connected other actors who were otherwise unconnected.

These measures provided insights into the interactions between system actors in this network. The Lattimore and district network was a relatively connected network with several key actors who served as influencers or intermediaries. This network examination clearly demonstrated that the district had more outgoing connections than incoming connections. Therefore, the district structure was likely hierarchical where the district shared information with schools, but schools had fewer opportunities to reciprocate. Network data, when

interpreted in tandem with qualitative data, can provide a picture of the district position and its activities around the mission.

This brief introduction to Social Network Analysis was an exercise, based on simulated data, to provide basic definitions of network and actor measures. In the study, I used similar measures to represent the network of relationships.